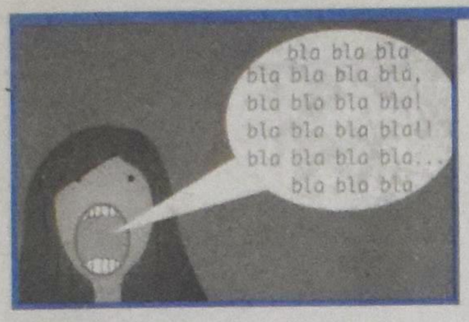

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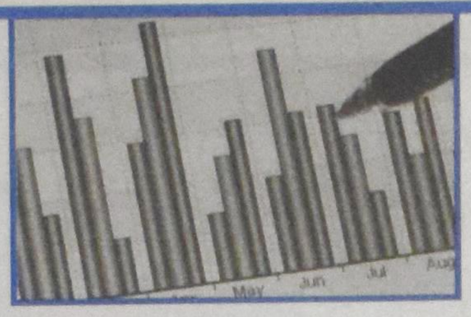

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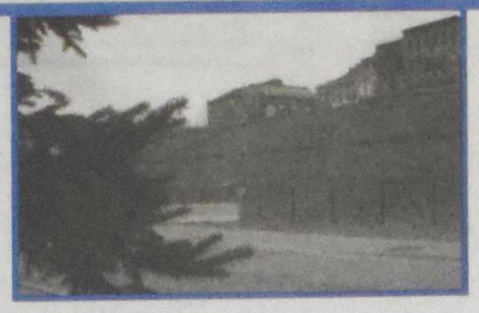

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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

CHRISTIAN COURIER

Egypt's difficult transition

Dena Nicolai

On Feb. 1, only days before the one-year anniversary of the resignation of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, a soccer match in the northern city of Port Said between the Al-Masri team and Al-Ahli (Egypt's national team) descended into chaos. What many Egyptians are now calling the "Port Said Massacre" resulted in 74 dead and over 1000 wounded, and became a rallying cry for renewed protests in Cairo's Tahrir square in the days and weeks following.

While tension and fights at soccer matches are not new in Egypt, the violence, number of dead and the parties involved in these clashes has new meaning and political significance in post-Mubarak Egypt. Conspiracy theories abound as to the exact cause of the chaos, but what is undisputed is the police incompetence: "When the fans went into the stadium, they weren't searched for weapons, even though officials knew that the match was likely to be violent," said one fan who was interviewed in the aftermath, echoing hundreds of others. Other reports – again validated by dozens of witnesses – described how, following the match, the lights were turned off, the gates sealed and security forces stood by and did little as the fights erupted.

"This has nothing to do with football," an Al-Ahli fan, Magdy Mohammed Ali told the BBC. "This is all about politics, this is all about some hidden war, so many theories that my head is going to burst." The two most commonly agreed on theories are 1) the riots were planned by Al-Masri fans, who were pushed and trained by the police and the ruling military council (SCAF) in retribution for the role the Ultras – the fans of the opposing team, Al-Ahli – have played in the Revolution and ongoing protests and 2) the resulting instability favours SCAF, who is trying to achieve continued momentum to keep power in its hands.

Regardless of the truth, the resulting public perception of these riots may be a pivot point for the direction of Egypt's ongoing revolution. As Egyptian-American journalist Issandr el Amrani writes, "The idea that an Egyptian deep state has been manipulating public fear of chaos is not new. Convicted criminals were released during last year's uprising in order to terrify ordinary Egyptians into rejecting calls for Mubarak's resignation. The later violent crackdowns against anti-military protesters seemed to be fairly widely accepted, as people blamed revolutionaries for perpetuating the insecurity. But the reaction to the Port Said stadium massacre shows that the silent majority's trust in Egypt's military rulers is waning fast."

Power structure

Egypt's power structure has long been triangular in nature. Prior to the resignation of Mubarak, the balance of power was a somewhat unstable relationship between the military, Muslim religious leaders and the government; each constrained by the other. Now, the players have shifted somewhat, and the balance has become a struggle between the religious groups (represented officially by the Muslim Brotherhood, who took 46 percent of the Parliamentary seats in recent elections), the so-called "revolutionaries" (who are deeply divided and continue to protest) and the military council

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Al-Ahli players run for safety as opposing fans charge the field.

The political life of Russian evangelicals

Gary Timmerman

The position of evangelical Christians in Russia has changed somewhat under Vladimir Putin's government compared to the Soviet power before 1990. The evangelical church now has colossal freedom to minister and reach out as it wishes. At least those are the words of one prominent Christian publisher in St. Petersburg: "Who interferes with our church life and our promoting of the faith? Nobody, we are completely free to do as we please! We praise the Lord for this!" But is this really the case?

Indeed, Putin has not presented himself as a persecutor of Protestant believers nor is he engaged in some kind of strict interference. But there are a few challenges that urban Protestant churches are experiencing, even under the more liberal stewardship of outgoing president Dmitry Medvedev. And there is some concern that this tendency will continue to grow.

Russian Orthodox churches such as the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow (pictured above) have received state assistance in restoring their facilities.

The reality is that it has become more difficult for Protestant groups in the cities to find a rental facility for worship meetings. Year after year during the past 20 years of rebuilding, Russian society is putting more spheres of its societal, cultural and economic life in some kind of order. One directive "from somewhere" has been to require various public and cultural buildings to limit their uses to their obvious purposes and to exclude religious and commercial activities in those premises. As a result, movie theatres, cultural halls and educational structures are becoming barred for religious use. It's hard to say whether these were steps taken specifically against the growing influence of competing religious alternatives, or if this requirement has been simply some natural "putting order in society." Church leaders say that probably both influences are taking place. Widely known in the West have been the stories of a decade of trials endured by founders of Russian-American Christian University (today called "Russian-American Institute") to construct a campus in Moscow. As another example of diminishing opportunities for ministry, since January of this year most Protestant volunteers conducting ministry in prisons have seen their names disqualified from

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News

Egypt *continued*

(SCAF). Many Egyptians – particularly Christians – feel there is strong collusion between the Muslim Brotherhood and SCAF. This leaves the revolutionaries – and therefore average Egyptian citizens – the losers in the power struggle. However, again, what the "Port Said Massacre" and the resulting riots have made even clearer is that SCAF is not shepherding the post-Mubarak democratic transition well. As this public sentiment grows, the Muslim Brotherhood is being forced to realize that any perception that they are siding with the military could turn popular opinion against them.

SCAF's military generals have continually emphasized that they have neither the desire nor the skills to run a country. However, their unspoken statement is that they will only step down if their power and autonomy are guaranteed; they want neither the government nor civilians looking over their shoulder and they will do whatever possible to ensure their independence. This is much to the chagrin of the revolutionaries, whose year-ago chants of "the army and the people are one hand" (a chant of unity) are distant echoes. The voices of Tahrir have now changed from, "the people want the fall of Mubarak" to "the people want the fall of the Military Council."

As intermittent protests continue in Cairo, the country as a whole remains in a state of unrest. The economy is precarious, the police are ineffective and crime is on the rise. In December, foreign NGO offices were raided by SCAF, who accused them of taking foreign funds without Egyptian permission, carrying out political activities unrelated to their work and failing to obtain necessary operating licenses. Later, almost 50 foreign NGO workers – including the son of the U.S. Transportation Secretary – were put on trial and prevented from leaving the country. After American pressure, the trial was adjourned and the workers flew out on March 5, easing rising Egyptian-American tension that was, according to U.S. officials, putting $1.3 billion of American aid to Egypt at risk. Though few Egyptians supported the detention, the suspicious resignation of the trial judge just a day before the travel ban was lifted has reminded the public that as much as they hope for an independent judiciary, they are still (as in the Mubarak era) subject to a judicial system that bends to intervention and official pressure.

Election scheduled

Though SCAF continues its dominance, the Parliament has sat, and a presidential election is scheduled for the end of May – only the second presidential election in Egypt's history with more than one candidate. Public opinion is divided on the candidates, and Mohammed El Baradei – a prominent reformer and former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency – has withdrawn, claiming the electoral system and the government are still being controlled by remnants of the former regime. Still, the immediacy of the elections and the promised verdict date of June 2 in the ongoing trial of Hosni Mubarak mean that those protesting on the streets are hearing at least some response.

However, the average Egyptian feels helpless in the onslaught of events. As 32-year-old Mohammed Moustafa laments, "It seems like every single day people die. I'm seeing more and more every day. The sight of blood became somehow normal; I'm not shocked like before." His friend Mina echoes the sadness, "I'm just hoping that people will realize soon that shedding more innocent blood will not make it any better."

The optimism that marked Egypt a year ago is scant on the country's streets today, and an all too familiar sense of resignation has set in. "The bad people won't leave Egypt

74 people died in the riots, and more than 1000 were injured.

easy I guess. I believe things will get harder for us and for Egypt," continues Mohammed. But Egyptians seek hope for the future. Says Mohammed, "My first prayer is that the bloodshed stops. Enough killing and wounded people. All Egyptians have become wounded physically or mentally. I pray that the mothers who lost their kids and wives who lost their husbands will find peace in life. I pray that Egypt would get rid of all the corruption that has gone into all the levels of Egyptians. I pray that all who are responsible for the bloodshed are arrested and put on fair trial for what they did to us and to our children. I pray that Egypt becomes one of the best countries in the world and the world capital of peace and safety. Pray for us."

Dena Nicolai lived and worked in Cairo, Egypt for four years between 2006 and 2011. She is now a Master's student at Regent College in Vancouver, B.C.

Political life *continued*

entry into prisons if they have served time themselves. It seems completely irrational for state authorities to impede successfully rehabilitated ex-cons from having access to prisoners.

The Russian state under Putin and Medvedev has brought in a series of laws which are meant to lift up the Russian Orthodox Church as the historical Christian faith. State television propaganda has aired Russian Orthodox broadcasts since 1997 in a battle with sects that unfortunately included unfriendly presentations of traditional evangelical Christians, and the masses have bought into this suspicion of non-Orthodox churches.

God's care

However, God is watching over his church in Russia. He not only gathers his people into the faith and unites them in worship wherever they can find a place, but he also mobilizes them to seek the lost and serve them. Pastors who connect with state and local authorities are saying that the authorities *are* receptive and grateful to them for the social work and enlightenment activity they perform in society. Yet even this activity is very difficult because most Protestant churches do not have church buildings, and the authorities do not provide free land or other favours as they do for the Orthodox. It is clear that the Orthodox Church gets a lot of help to restore their dilapidated buildings, and they began this period of new religious freedom with lots of church buildings. Most Orthodox Church buildings got ruined or redesigned during the Soviet period and have been in need of major repairs, whereas Protestants hardly had any church buildings with which to launch their spiritual revival.

A key factor as to why Russian evangelicals are still so weak politically and socially is simply because they have not grown in numbers to a point where they have a chance to influence their country or town in these ways. It is estimated

Pastor sizing up a derelict building for a future rehab center.

that there are about two million evangelical Christians in Russia today, which is somewhere between one and two percent of the population of 143 million citizens.

The individual believer is free to get involved in politics and any causes for justice and freedom. "Russian believers understand that they must be salt and light for Christ in all parts of society," confirmed one Pentecostal bishop. "But realistically, outside of miraculous exceptions which do exist, we can influence in politics when believers stand *not alone*, but only when there's a critical mass of Christian folk participating and influencing in the society. For instance, in Ukraine or in Belarus, there's 10 percent or more of the population who are evangelical Christians. As a block they are recognized and counted as a respected group by the authorities. Should trouble arise for a congregation to acquire land or build their church building, the local bishop can confidently approach the mayor's office and resolve the situation, most often with a positive result. When such a situation rises in Russia, we cannot have the same confidence entering the political arena, because we have not yet achieved those numbers and that population power to be recognized."

On the other hand, evangelical ministry in the social and humanitarian fields is having a tremendous effect locally in winning goodwill at the prisons, in smaller towns, in the orphanages, with the police and before city authorities, not to mention the comfort their spiritual work brings to families of addicts who have witnessed the new life in Christ that God mercifully brings to sons and daughters through widespread rehabilitation ministries. Founders of Canadian and American churches can relate to a phenomenon of tandem ministries that grow in Russia – a church and a rehab ministry. When Dutch immigrants started a church, they soon built a Christian school. In modern-day Russia, when believers build a church, they also plan the building or purchase of a separate rehab center. These are the most potent spiritual children in today's Russian evangelical churches and the future of a strong, transformational church.

Politics

All pastors who have meetings with city or town administrators, hospitals, orphanages or schools declare themselves openly as Christian believers. Rarely do they get the message, "Oh, you are believers, we're against you and we ban you from activity with our citizens!" This was still the case a generation ago. Occasionally it happens that a bureaucrat is a fanatical Orthodox believer and will block Protestant ministry, but this is an exception today.

Today it looks still true that politics in Russia is too dirty a business for saintly hearts, and believers polled without exception consider that a position in the government world cannot be gained without a great amount of tainted money,

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News

Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang

Taking joy seriously

You pray in your distress and in your need; would that you might also pray in the fullness of your joy and in your days of abundance. – Khalil Gibran

When I was six or seven years old, we lived on a quiet suburban street in Oshawa. The house across the street from ours was set atop a little, grassy hill. An older couple lived there, the Johnsons. Their children had all grown up and moved away. They didn't mind that the neighbourhood kids played on their lawn, even when it was a half-dozen of us or more, running up and down their hill all through the long summer days and nights.

Because that was the game – you would run to the top of Johnson's hill, and run down with your arms flung wide – feeling feather-light with the rush of air around you and the sun on your face. And then you would run back up, and run down again, until you collapsed, with grass-stained knees and grubby hands, until Mr. Johnson brought you a glass of lemonade, pretending to be grumpy, but with a twinkle in his eye that said, deep down, he loved us.

To this day, that is my definition of joy. Joy is running downhill, with your arms outstretched, and smiling.

I'm not alone in finding joy in the little things. Long before the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series came along, the great 19th century pastor Henry Ward Beecher wrote that "the art of being happy lies in the power of extracting happiness from common things."

Indeed, the Bible says similar things about joy. Psalm 118 describes it as something we should feel simply because we're alive. "This is the day the Lord has made," the Psalmist writes. "We will rejoice and be glad in it." In John 15, just after Jesus describes his love for his disciples, he goes on to say that "I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!" And, of course, in Galatians we read that joy is one of the fruits of the spirit. It's a powerful image: if we have the spirit of God living in us, joy will spring from us.

In fact, some of the most profound writing about joy – defining it, describing it, and inspired by it – is to be found in the Bible and in the works of Christian authors like C.S. Lewis. Lewis once described joy as "the serious business of heaven." That's probably why the word "joy" appears 165 times in the King James Version of the Bible.

So you would think that, with all the biblical references to joy …

And all the writing about joy …

To say nothing of the sacred songs and music ("Jesus Joy of Man's Desiring", "Joy to the World", etc.) that encourage us to be joyful …

That Christians would be joyful people.

You would think that we would be people running about with our arms outstretched, and smiling, as it were.

Not joyful people

Take a look around your church on Sunday. Look at the faces around you before, during, and after the church service. And if you can find a reflective surface anywhere – maybe the side of the offertory plate as it goes by, or a bald guy with a really shiny head – take a look at yourself. Would you describe the faces that you see, including your own, as "joyful?" Probably not. As Jerry Seinfeld likes to say, "what's the deal with that, anyway?" Because contemporary Christians are not, generally, seen as joyful people.

When we get involved in politics, it always seems because we want to reignite the abortion debate, or demand the right to discriminate against people on religious grounds.

Joy is running downhill, with your arms outstretched, and smiling.

When we try to make art (like movies, for instance) we come up with ham-fisted, preachy clunkers like *Left Behind*. And, to paraphrase Hank Hill, Christian rock doesn't seem to make Christianity better, it just makes rock 'n roll worse. Worst of all, when we make news, it's because of incidents like the One Million Mom project launching a holy war against JC Penney for having Ellen DeGeneres as their spokesperson.

It seems like everywhere you turn in the media, there's an evangelical group wagging their finger about something. Or protesting something. Or sticking their long, blue noses into sexual issues. And while it's true that the media only reports on conflict, we Christians seem willing to supply it.

In fact, just recently, a friend of mine asked why we Christians seem so angry all the time. I didn't have a good answer to that question. I still don't. Because our faith shouldn't be a burden we feel we need to lug around with us. It shouldn't be something we feel compelled to dump on others. It shouldn't be a club we use to knock people down, or the only yardstick we use when measuring the worth of another human being.

Our faith shouldn't be any of those things. It should be the ultimate source of joy. It should be so evident on our faces and in our lives that others, looking at us, should be thinking "I'll have what he's having." Because what is the point of faith, if not joy? It was Christ, with his arms outstretched, on a hill, who took away all those burdens that weigh us down. Our sin. Our regret. Our fear. And we believe in him so that we can be his children, and run, and be in the light, with the sun shining on our faces – and smiling.

Lloyd Rang (Lloyd.rang@rogers.com) lives in Bowmanville, Ont.

Political life *continued*

dishonesty and deep compromises of conscience. Confirms the bishop, "Along with our restructuring of society have come a lot of negative developments, and so those have affected the evangelical mind to keep a cautious distance from political life, even though we haven't developed some theological stand that participation in politics is sin. Our limits in political life are simple and common: pastors have a calling to serve as shepherds of their flock and should never abandon their ministry for politics. Second, churches should never be active in politics, as is true in general across the world."

As the political situation in Russia looks to another six or 12 years with President Vladimir Putin, evangelical Christians have not skipped a beat in their approach to the power over them. "In nearly every worship service I attend in many different churches, pastors lead their congregations *weekly* in praying for their president, his deputies and for all administrators who carry some local responsibility for all believers' well-being and for the needy they are trying to reach," this writer has witnessed. "The Bible says, regardless who is placed there, we believe strongly that God placed them there for our good, and we must obey them and pray for them as our Christian duty." In believing this, Russian Christians also hope that the life and ministry of believers in the society will truly get better and better.

Gary and Galina Timmerman, missionaries for Christian Reformed World Missions, have been living the past 10 years in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

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Editorials

In the desert: silence

Brian Bork

This article is part of an ongoing series of reflections on the writings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, a group of third century monks, nuns, hermits and ascetics who sought spiritual wisdom by living in the desert.

I've been taking jazz guitar lessons since late last fall. I've actually been playing guitar for more than 15 years, but I'm hoping these lessons will help me become fluent in something new after strumming my way through the same old same old for the past few years.

Learning a new style is like learning a new language. If you've learned a new language, you'll know the temptation of falling back on familiar words and phrases if you get stuck in the new one. My teacher tells me I do this a lot – if I'm plonking my way through a solo over a particularly tricky chorus, I'll fall back on stock riffs and phrases I've picked up over the years. They might sound kind of clever to a disinterested listener, and they give me the strange reassurance of knowing that I've at least filled the air with something. Yet anyone tilting their ear for something that's worth hearing would know that I've been more or less babbling across the fretboard.

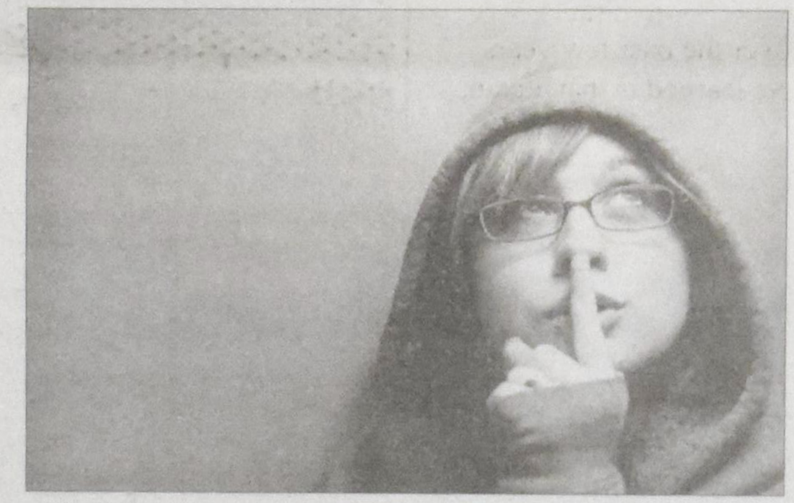
My teacher tells me I need to sit and listen. I need to play one note over the chord changes, and hear how that single note fits with each chord. But jazz at its root is a musical conversation, and I'd love nothing more than to jump in with a few sapient remarks over the changes. To be told I'll only know how to speak by sitting and saying nearly nothing seems to be a counterintuitive way to learn.

Aimless babbling is obviously not just a musical problem. It afflicts our conversations, too, and thus our relationships with our neighbours. The Desert Fathers and Mothers were well aware that the temptation to babble went beyond a lack of social etiquette; excessive chatter was spiritually dangerous too. And since these monastic folks were ever seeking a more refined spiritual connection to God and their neighbours, they cultivated silence in a radical way. It was said of Abba Agatho, for instance, that he "carried a stone in his mouth for three years until he learned to be silent."

It'd be mistaken to imagine that this silence is merely the cessation of talking. It also shouldn't be confused with being *silenced*, which is toxic and oppressive. Instead, silence, for our ancient brothers and sisters, was the means by which they tuned themselves to be aware of their environment. Out in the desert, where there wasn't much happening, this meant becoming ever more aware of their interior life, a space as vast and open as any wilderness. It was a way of being watchful, of listening for the fullness of God's presence in a place that can so often seem arid and empty. This attentiveness was so vital to the life of the monk that Abba Bessarion, on his deathbed, thought it necessary to commend these last words: "the monk should be like the cherubim and seraphim: all eye."

Patience and courage

Of course, all this waiting and watching requires great reserves of patience. Courage, too: for silence often brings with it moments of deep awkwardness, panic, helplessness and despair. The monastic life was full of this struggle, as is ours. Hence our urge to raise our voice and bust through silence with whatever thoughts are at the forefront of our mind, no matter how insipid. We make small talk at our spiritual peril. Our quick-fix culture conditions us to be wary of being patiently watchful or attentive, and it's no small wonder we speak hastily in a Christian dialect distended by clichés, trite consolations and vapid truisms. (Could there be a finer prescription than an oath of silence for someone who says "love the sinner, hate the sin"?)



Silence is a way of being watchful and listening for the fullness of God's presence.

The trouble with these clichés isn't that they're lazy speech; it's that they're often the source of behaviour that's deeply hurtful to our neighbours. I know a student who lives in an intentional community with other Christians near campus. Last spring she told me some of her housemates had adopted the habit of "speaking the truth to each other in love," which meant they'd been practicing the condescending charity of pointing out each other's failings. Unsurprisingly, this new practice hadn't increased the camaraderie under their roof and recriminations abounded.

I wonder what "speaking the truth in love" would've sounded like on the lips of Agatho or Bessarion. Perhaps they wouldn't have made much of a sound at all, choosing instead the solidarity of patient silence. For they would've known that in lieu of their own words, there would be space for another Word: the ever-creative and renewing One that resonates in the very depths of all of us. To be truly silent means listening for that Word, which brings truth to bear on the good words we may, on occasion, find on our tongues.

Brian is the CRC chaplain at the University of Waterloo & Wilfrid Laurier University. He's been saving up for a fancy Gibson guitar which he (foolishly) believes will make him a more eloquent jazzman.

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The cruellest month

Michael Buma

"I've had it better than some and I know that I shouldn't complain / Though my grandfather told me once that all pain hurts the same." – Langhorne Slim

When T.S. Eliot wrote that "April is the cruellest month," he wasn't talking about the plight of part-time professors in the modern university system. But he easily could have been.

Many people outside the university don't really know how the system works, or recognize the extent to which it relies on unfair and exploitative labour practices when it comes to "contract academic staff." Also known as adjuncts, lecturers, sessionals, limited duties faculty and part-timers, these people – of which I am one – are employed from year to year on contract to teach university courses.

With the exception of administrative duties (which can be significant), part-time faculty members have largely the same responsibilities as our full-time colleagues but at a fraction of the pay and with no job security or benefits. We are typically hired in September and let go again in April, and most of us work long, gruelling hours trying to establish a research and publication profile while at the same time staying current in the field and keeping on top of our teaching. Many part-timers need to cobble together teaching at several different institutions in order to pay their bills, resulting in lengthy commutes and wasted hours on the road (another name I've heard applied to part-timers is "road scholars").

In the past four years I've taught at three different universities, two of which were more than an hour's drive away and none of which paid what amounted to a living wage. One of these was a Christian university whose English department – when I taught there anyways – had more part-time faculty than full-time, a fact that seems to me simply inexcusable. Even in a difficult economy, Christians should hold themselves to a higher standard and refuse to adopt the unjust and exploitative labour practices of their secular peers.

I should begin by pointing out that my failure to land a full-time tenure-track professorship is not for lack of trying. I have published a well-received book and six academic articles, two in top-tier journals in my field, and presented my research at more than 10 academic conferences. I have taught 17 different university courses or sections to date, garnered stellar teaching reviews, and received the University Students' Council Award of Teaching Excellence at my home university. In the past, people got tenure-track jobs on significantly less. I don't say any of this to brag, because there are lots of strong candidates in exactly the same position. People who did everything they were told would get them a job, but who now find themselves mired in part-time purgatory with no reasonable hope of escape.

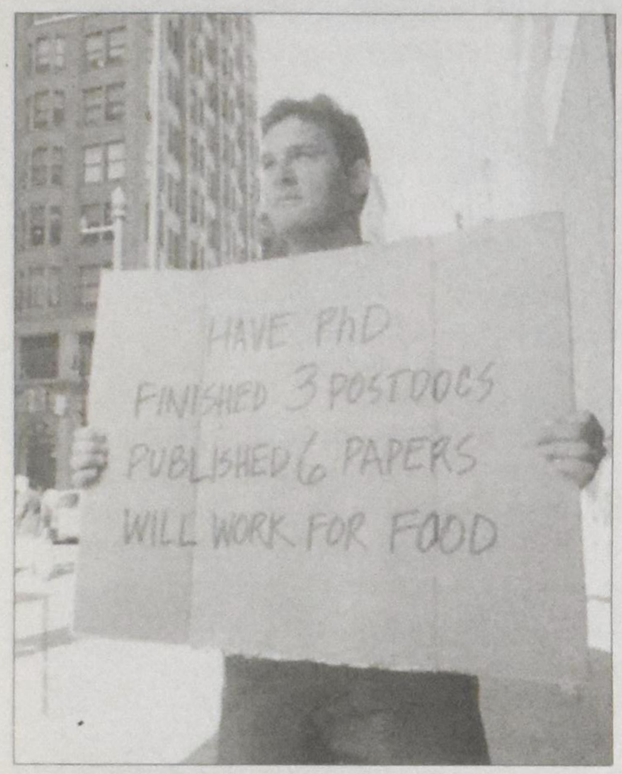
Greener pastures?

So why would anyone put up with all this? Why not just leave academia for greener pastures? The truth is that many of us stick with it for the same reason we chose to do PhDs in the first place: because we're passionate about learning and teaching, and realize that once we let go of part-time teaching (while at the same time trying to build up our CVs, publish as much as possible and apply for the precious few full-time positions that do come up) the dream of landing a full-time tenure-track professorship is officially dead.

Editorial

The cruellest month *continued*

Of course some people stick around for more pragmatic reasons as well, because in today's economic climate – particularly for those of us in the Arts and Humanities – there's really no work out there other than slinging coffee at Starbuck's. I finished my PhD in July 2008, which was pretty much the worst possible time to enter the job market. What little money there had been for new tenure-track hires dried up almost completely in the economic meltdown, and the abolition of mandatory retirement ensured that the long-anticipated exodus of baby boomers from the profession never materialized. Combined with the government of Ontario's audaciously stupid decision to double graduate enrolment over the coming decade, these factors created the perfect storm for newly-minted PhDs trying to find work. This decision was "audaciously stupid," by the way, because we already have far more PhDs than full-time professorships for them to occupy. Contrary to what politicians and university administrators tell us (who have a vested interest in protecting and perpetuating the system that ensures they have an endless supply of cheap academic labour), advanced graduate degrees currently have no value whatsoever outside the academy in a hiring climate where experience – not education – is pre-eminent.



Many PhD grads struggle to find full-time work.

Although my dream is still to land a tenure-track professorship, I've come realize that it will take a miracle for this to happen. So in addition to praying for a miracle, I've been applying to different entry-level jobs outside the academy over the past few years in the attempt to get some kind of career off the ground. What I've learned is that, again, a PhD in English is pretty much worthless outside the university. And yes, I've read all the literature on how to market myself, done a number of information interviews, and attempted in earnest to access the so-called "hidden job market" (as a sidenote, I'd like to propose a moratorium on the writing of "how to find a job" literature by people who are successfully employed).

When I began my PhD program I thought I had a failsafe backup plan in the event that I couldn't get a tenure-track professorship: teaching high school. I started grad school in the days when demographers still anticipated mass retirements and teacher shortages in the elementary and secondary school systems, so this seemed very reasonable at the time. But with the abolition of mandatory retirement none of this came to pass, and in another shining example of political brilliance and foresight we began credentialing far more teachers than we could ever possibly hope to employ. Over the past five years Ontario has had an average teacher retirement rate of 4,500 per year, while at the same time we've certified approximately 12,000 new teachers each year. And let me be clear that I use the word "we" very liberally here, as the Ontario government currently allows foreign schools such as New York's Niagara University and Australia's Charles Stuart University to issue Ontario teaching certificates. So even if I did decide to go back for more education to get a teacher's certificate (I hear Australia is lovely this time of year!), my chances of getting a job as a high school teacher are probably only a little better than my chances of making the NHL. (Note to Brian Burke: I'm still waiting for your call).

Education and opportunity

Some would say that people like me were naïve to try our luck in academia in the first place. I disagree. We simply believed the lie our society persists in telling young people that education invariably leads to career opportunities. We also believed the lies we were told by our programs, that "everyone [with a PhD] who wants an academic job and works hard gets one" (this is a direct quote from a well-respected professor during my first year of grad school). The fact of the matter is that, speaking in strictly career terms, doing a PhD in the Arts and Humanities is the worst possible decision anyone can make. While this may sound rather melodramatic, there is a preponderance of recent research and analysis corroborating this claim and examining what some people have taken to calling the "PhD crisis" (for a good starting place, if you're interested, see Thomas H. Benton's article "Graduate School in the Humanities: Just Don't Go" in the January 2009 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*).

And so April rolls around again, and I'm feeling a very familiar sense of dread and despair. Will I get enough courses for next year? Will I have to spend more time in the car than the classroom to do so? Will I ever get a fulfilling full-time job with benefits and decent pay? I'm tired of scanning job boards, tired of sending out applications, tired of reading smarmy advice from Human Resources types on how to market myself for the "new economy." In short, I am beginning to lose hope.

These problems are personal, but they are also societal. Many young people I know, including a number of my former students, are encountering exactly the same difficulties when it comes to finding fulfilling work (or fulfilling work on anything beyond a short-term contract basis with no long term prospects attached or implicit). These people are understandably upset about their situations. They feel discouraged and rootless, and are disillusioned by the lie they've been raised on that education leads to "success." While they put high value on the education they've received and believe that knowledge is intrinsically worth having, they still need to eat. And, in a need perhaps just as pressing, they require a sense of direction, purpose and belonging, all of which tend to be tied to some extent in our culture to one's vocation or lack thereof.

This is also a theological problem. Jesus said "seek and you shall find." But what happens when you seek with every ounce of effort you can muster, only to find frustration and failure? These are questions I plan to take up in my next editorial, and are absolutely critical to the ways in which churches deal with today's young adults who are long on education and short on opportunity.

Michael Buma teaches in the English and Kinesiology departments at the University of Western Ontario, and is interim editor of the Christian Courier.

"Rebuke the discerning, and they will gain knowledge."
Proverbs 19:25

Have something to say about one of our articles? Send a letter to *editor@christiancourier.ca* and be part of the conversation.

"...AND FINALLY TONIGHT, SOME GOOD NEWS: OUR RECORD-WARM WINTER MEANS THE HUMANS WILL BE OUT EARLIER THAN NORMAL THIS YEAR...."

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News

Christians in Sudan being ousted, 'suffer grievously'

KHARTOUM, SUDAN (Worthy News) – Thousands of Christians stripped of their citizenship are now being forced out of Sudan in the wake of the South's secession back in January 2011.

Christians were given until April 8 to either leave the Islamic northern state or be treated as foreigners under a regime that is openly hostile to non-Arabs and non-Muslims. Christians remaining in Sudan after that deadline may face increased persecution or forced repatriation. In either case, thousands of refugees to South Sudan will surely trigger a humanitarian crisis.

The Sudanese ultimatum came as the new state of South Sudan struggled with a food shortage caused by a drought that has ruined its crops. The UN World Food Program estimates that as many as five million people in South Sudan will suffer from malnutrition this year.

Further, South Sudan's resources are already being strained by the arrival of refugees from South Kordofan and the Blue Nile, where 185,000 have already fled the latest genocidal campaign of a dictator demanding a purely Arab Islamic state.

"Despite the end of the long civil war and independence of South Sudan, Christians in both nations continue to suffer grievously," said Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director of Barnabas Aid. "South Sudan is taking the strain as hundreds of thousands of people flee from President Omar al-Bashir's ongoing brutal campaign to Islamize and Arabize Sudan completely. Our brothers and sisters need our help and prayers as they are forced to leave their homes and rebuild their lives elsewhere."

50,000 in 140 U.S. cities march for 'religious freedom,' against healthcare mandate

Marian Van Til

BUFFALO, NY – The "Obamacare" mandate that will not exempt faith-based hospitals, academic institutions, social service agencies and other religious organizations from mandatory provision of free contraceptives, abortifacients and sterilization to employees is seen by those groups and by increasing numbers of as an infringement of religious freedom. (See previous stories in *CC*.)

On March 21 some 54,000 Americans in 140 cities from sea to sea used their lunch hour to protest that infringement in a "rally for religious freedom." Twenty-five-hundred people participated in Chicago, 2300 in Philadelphia, 2200 in Minneapolis, 2000 each in Washington and San Diego, 1500 in Cleveland, 1200 in San Francisco and about 1000 in New York. In many smaller cities the crowds were bigger in terms of percentages of population; for example, 1000 in Bismarck, N.D. and 500 in Grand Rapids, Mich.

The rally's national co-director Monica Migliorino Miller explained, "The goal of Stand Up for Religious Freedom is to raise nationwide awareness that the HHS (Health and Human Services) Mandate is an attack on personal conscience and the right to religious liberty – but even beyond that goal, this movement seeks to strengthen the resolve of American citizens generally and all people of faith more specifically to fight against this illicit and completely unjust intrusion of government into the affairs of religious practice and belief and be ready to stand up for our beliefs in times of persecution!"

The rally came just five days before the U.S. Supreme Court began hearing arguments for and against the constitutionality of the healthcare law, and specifically whether an existing commerce law endows Congress with the broad powers to require every citizen to buy health insurance. The court's answer is expected in June. Whatever the ruling, observers say it will very likely have a profound impact on the November presidential election.

Quebec assembly committee calls for assisted suicide

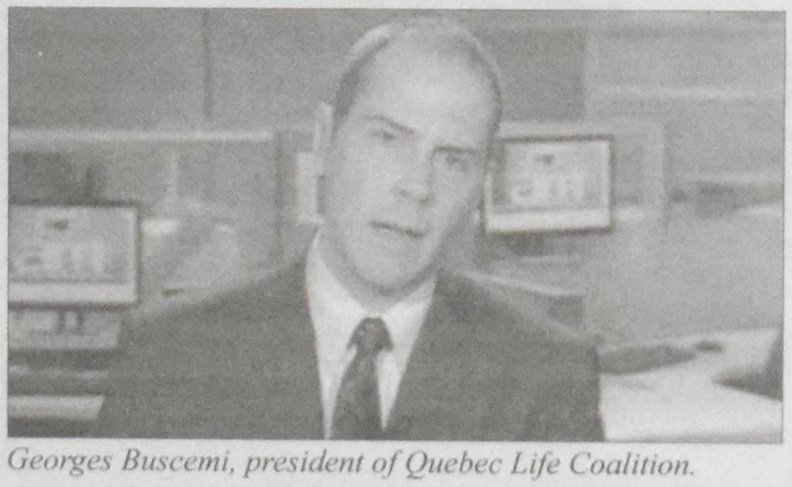
QUEBEC CITY (LifeSiteNews) – The Quebec National Assembly released a report late last month calling on the provincial government to legalize euthanasia according to a Netherlands/Belgium model, effectively ignoring existing federal laws that protect human life.

"The pertinent laws should be modified to recognize medical aid in dying as an appropriate end to life option," states the provincial parliamentary committee's "Dying with Dignity" report. According to the report, persons opting for "medical aid in dying" must be a resident of Quebec, an adult, must have freely requested the "medical help" to die, must suffer from a "serious and incurable disease," must have a medical situation with "no prospects of improvement," and must be experiencing "physical or psychological suffering which is constant and unbearable."

Alex Schadenberg, executive director of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition, told LifeSiteNews that the report is "very concerning." It "uses the philosophical approach of Peter Singer in which human life, in-and-of-itself, does not have any intrinsic value, and where personhood is based on one's mental capabilities or self awareness," Schadenberg said.

He pointed out that the report ignored the overwhelming 2010 defeat of a similar bill that sought to legalize euthanasia. At that time, the House of Commons rejected Bill C-384 proposed by MP Francine Lalonde by an across-party-lines vote of 228 to 59.

"The report does not adequately address concerns related to elder abuse, suicide prevention and vulnerability at the end of life, as addressed by the recent report by the



Georges Buscemi, president of Quebec Life Coalition.

Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care," wrote Schadenberg on his blog.

Collective 'suicide'

Georges Buscemi of Quebec Life Coalition told LifeSiteNews that the "Dying with Dignity" report simply confirms what he see as Quebec's "collective suicide." Buscemi is "disappointed" with the direction that Quebec is taking on life issues. "Only a dramatic turn-around will save Quebec from extinction," he said. "Quebec's people have completely sawed themselves off from the branch they were sitting on 50 years ago. They're going to hit the ground soon. This is just another step on that road to perdition. It is a really sad day for this province. It is a day of mourning. They really are obstinately making the same mistake over and over, which is just refusing life, refusing policies that promote life."

While the "Dying with Dignity" committee boasted that "medical aid to die is in line with changing social values, law and medical practice," Schadenberg pointed out that the committee ignored the results of their own public hearings on the issue, where 156 of 271 briefs were against or somewhat against euthanasia and assisted suicide.

"The recommendations of the Quebec committee are contrary to the view and ethics of nearly every medical association in Canada and around the world," said Schadenber. "The report recommends a radical reformation of the doctor-patient relationship."

The report came days before Justice Lynn Smith was expected to make her decision in the Carter case in B.C., a case that the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition has warned is an attempt to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide nationwide in Canada through the court. Schadenberg says the Quebec report and the Carter case could not be worse for Canadians who value human life. "This is timed in such a way that we are getting a one-two punch."

Prophet Jeremiah and two opponents come to life through archaeology

JERUSALEM (BHD) – The relationship between archaeology and the Bible is not always an easy one, but sometimes they come together in striking agreement as witnesses to history. Two small clay bullae (seal impressions) found in the course of Israeli archaeologist Eilat Mazar's City of David excavations are bringing Jeremiah, God's prophet to the last kings of Judah, back to life.

The first of the clay bullae, which surfaced during Mazar's excavation of what may be King David's palace, bears the name "Yehuchal [or Jehucal] ben Shelemyahu [Shelemiah]" (at left in photo). The second was found in the First Temple period strata underneath what has been identified as Nehemiah's Northern Tower, just a few yards away from the first, and reads "Gedalyahu [Gedaliah] ben Pashur" (at right in photo).

These two men are mentioned together in the Old Testament as ministers of King Zedekiah (597-587 B.C.). As the Babylonians closed in on Jerusalem during the last years of the First Temple period, Jeremiah told Zedekiah and the people of the city to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar's men so that their lives and city might be spared. But not everyone liked Jeremiah's message, including Gedaliah son of Pashur and Jehucal son of Shelemiah. According to Jeremiah 38:1-13, the two ministers had Jeremiah thrown into a pit because they did not like his message of surrender (which meant relying on God and not on themselves).

Biblical Archaeology Review readers have been introduced to these tiny but amazing clay bullae in recent articles by Hebrew University archaeologist Eilat Mazar about her excavations in the City of David, but now visitors to Edmond, Okla., can see them at their world premiere at the Armstrong Auditorium on the campus of Armstrong College.

The "Seals of Jeremiah's Captors Discovered" exhibit, which continues through Oct. 16, 2012, features the two clay bullae as well as dozens of ceramic artefacts from Jerusalem during the First Temple period, including figurines, royal seal impressions and one of the largest ancient vessels ever found in Jerusalem.

News

Former U.S. President Carter likens 'fundamentalist' John Paul II to Khomeini

ATLANTA (WCN) – Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter has disclosed that he had angry exchanges with Pope John Paul II about liberation theology and about the ordination of women. And those exchanges greatly coloured his view of the late pope.

The former president said that he complained to the pontiff about the Catholic church's "perpetuation of the subservience of women" while John Paul II was visiting the U.S. in 1978, and "there was more harshness when we turned to the subject of liberation theology."

Carter said he classified the Pope as a "fundamentalist," placing him in that category along with Iran's late Ayatollah Khomeini. He also applied the term to atheist neoconservatives and a number of his fellow Baptists.

Carter hasn't changed his mind about John Paul II since he wrote in his 2005 book *Our Endangered Values* that fundamentalists "tend to demagogue emotional issues" and "are often angry and sometimes resort to verbal or even physical abuse against those who interfere with the implementation of their agenda."

Jimmy Carter

Carter made his remarks as he introduced a new edition of the Bible with his own study notes. The "NIV Lessons from Life Bible: Personal Reflections with Jimmy Carter" (Zondervan) contains the full text of the New International Version of the Bible along with the former president's prayers, reflections and asides. Carter admits to "not having training in religion or theology," but appeals to his authority as someone who has "taught Bible lessons for more than 65 years." He had previously released recordings of the Sunday school classes he teaches and written previous books about the Bible.

Carter disassociated himself from the orthodoxly biblical Southern Baptist Convention in 2000. (Well-known scholar and commentator R. Albert Mohler is president of the seminary associated with the Southern Baptist Convention.) Carter and another former U.S. President, Bill Clinton, attempted to realign Baptists in a more liberal direction by calling for a new Baptist convention in 2008.

In the same recent interview Carter said that "it is very fine for gay people to be married in civil ceremonies," although he suggested – "maybe arbitrarily" – that churches should not be required by law to solemnize same-sex unions.

'Your God's wrong': Ontario judge erupts, sends pro-lifer back to jail

TORONTO (LSN) – An Ontario Court of Justice judge erupted in a lengthy, angry tirade against pro-life activist Mary Wagner – and ejected a spectator from the public gallery – in a downtown Toronto courtroom on March 22. The judge, S. Ford Clements, then sent Wagner to jail for an additional 92 days, which were added to 88 days she had already served prior to trial. The judge pronounced Wagner guilty of "mischief" and added two counts of failing to comply with probation orders.

The charges related to Wagner's Nov. 8, 2011 arrest at the site of the Bloor West Village women's clinic. Wagner had been arrested on several occasions for peacefully entering abortion facilities in Toronto, where she would present women in the waiting room with a rose and offer them pro-life counselling.

The remarkable scene played itself out after Crown attorney Derek Ishak and defence counsel Russell Browne made a joint submission to the judge for time served plus a three-year probationary term. But Clements emphatically rejected the submission.

"She can sit in jail, if that's the only way to protect people," he fumed, calling Wagner "cowardly" for "abusing other human beings" and not having the courage to make her views known through other channels. "This is an extraordinary waste of resources. Get a grip!"

'You're going to jail' – again

Clements continued his tirade, "You don't get it, do you? What's the rule of law? You're required to abide by it.... You've lost the right as a citizen to be anywhere near an abortion clinic or to speak to an employee. You're wrong and your God's wrong. You have complete contempt.... You don't have a right to cause [abortion-seeking women] extra pain and grief the way you do. Abortion is legal. That's all you have to understand. You start causing people emotional pain and harm, you think that's okay?"

Justice Clements then asked Wagner whether she would stay away from abortion sites for three years as required by the proposed terms of probation.

"I will not," Wagner replied firmly.

"Then you're going to jail," said Clements.

Earlier, one of Wagner's supporters in the public gallery spoke up in her support. Clements spoke to the man about the "rule of law," and when the man attempted to respond, Clements ejected him from the courtroom.

After a noon recess, Clements observed that joint submissions by the Crown and defence were not binding on a judge. He said in his view, the submission as it was would be contrary to the public interest and would bring the administration of justice into disrepute.

Asked whether she had anything to say prior to sentencing, Wagner said, "The letter of the law does not always maintain justice. Abortion is a short-term solution but causes long-term pain." She added that she never acts out of a lack of sensitivity, but rather attempts to love the women to whom she speaks. She pointed to examples from history where people who were initially regarded as criminals were later found to be in the right.

Clements was unmoved. "You have, in some measure, displayed utter contempt for the courts and the rights of others," he said. "You appear to be governed by a higher moral order than the laws of our country. Your determination to break the law is a potential threat to the well-being of society and plants the seeds of lawlessness, perhaps even anarchy."

'These people' do not work alone

In concluding, Clements accepted the testimony of abortion site co-owner Patricia Hasen, who filed a victim impact statement that claimed financial hardship caused by Wagner's actions, including the necessity to hire a "counsellor" from another abortion site. Hasen also said she was "scared a bit" when Wagner allegedly held a door open, adding she "doesn't trust this woman's peaceful demeanour" and worries about potential aggression. "These people do not work alone."

Crown attorney Ishak, in his submissions, charged that pro-life activists "prey upon the emotional vulnerability" of abortion patients as "they evidently pursue martyrdom." The "flouting" of laws, he charged, harkens back to "the Dark Ages" and blurs the line between might and right. He suggested Wagner's actions mark an increase in "the aggressive nature" of pro-life demonstrations, creating emotional distress.

There was no immediate word on whether Wagner planned to appeal either the verdicts or what amounted to a six-month jail sentence. There is also an option to file a complaint with the Ontario Judicial Council (OJC) over Clements' statements and conduct in the courtroom. According to the OJC website, "If you have a complaint of misconduct about a provincial judge or a justice of the peace, you must state your complaint in a signed letter. The letter of complaint should include the date, time and place of the court hearing and as much detail as possible about why you feel there was misconduct."

Poll: 'Anti-Semitic notions' increase among French, other Europeans

Marian Van Til, *with files from LAT*

PARIS – In the past three years French attitudes towards Jews have degenerated, according to a poll from the Anti-Defamation League based in New York City. "Jews hold too much power in business and world finance" is one of the "classical anti-Semitic notions" that has become more common since 2009, according to the poll released on March 20.

Almost half of the French people surveyed said it is "probably true" that Jews who live in France are more loyal to Israel than France. And more than one-third of respondents agreed that Jews "still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust."

Bias against Jews is in the spotlight in France after a gunman killed a rabbi and three children at a Jewish school in Toulouse on March 19. The French interior minister noted that the attacker, suspected to have links to a group associated with Al Qaeda, said he shot them in revenge for the killing of Palestinian children.

Vandalism in French Jewish cemetery on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Jan. 27, 2012.

While the actual number of attacks on French Jews fell last year, the aggressiveness of the violent attacks and vandalism rose according to the Protection Service for the Jewish Community, which provides security for synagogues and Jewish celebrations. And despite the decline there were still 389 incidents.

The survey covered nine European nations besides France. Five thousand telephone interviews were conducted across Europe, 500 in each country surveyed. Nearly one-third of the Europeans surveyed hold "pernicious anti-Semitic beliefs," the Anti-Defamation League said.

While the survey did not draw conclusion on the causes of the rise in anti-Semitism, many readers who responded to both newspaper and online news reports of the poll made the observation that "with the rise of Muslim numbers in the EU, anti-Semitism also rises."

Columns

Principalities & Powers

David Koyzis

Russian culture and politics

Normally, I teach a course in Russian politics in autumn of odd-numbered years. However, due to my sabbatical leave last term, I did not teach this course then but will teach it during the autumn of this year. The course began as a course in Soviet politics 20 years ago, just as the Soviet Union was winding down for good, to be replaced by 15 independent republics, of which Russia is by far the largest. At first it became an area-studies course in post-Soviet politics, but 10 years ago I narrowed it down to Russian politics alone.

Since then, however, the course has taken on the character of a Russian culture and politics course, mostly because I have come to recognize the huge impact that cultural attitudes have on a country's political life.

Accordingly, one of the ironies of history, which I am at a loss to explain, is that there frequently seems to be an inverse relationship between political stability on the one hand and literary and artistic achievement on the other. Take the Russians as just one example. I have long been an admirer of the Russian cultural achievement. It would be difficult for any people to surpass in greatness a civilization that has produced the calibre of music, novels, plays and paintings created by the Russians. It is all the more remarkable that such accomplishments have taken root and grown in mostly hostile political soil.

For example, it was during the reactionary reign of Nicholas I that Russia entered what might be called its golden age of literary and artistic endeavour. Alexander Pushkin was certainly the greatest of the literary figures of this era, his works eventually to attain for Russians something of the status of Shakespeare's for the English-speaking peoples. In music Mikhail Glinka would have a similar stature. The brilliance of the Russian contribution in these fields can hardly be overestimated. The novels of Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy and Ivan Turgenev are justly celebrated, both inside and outside Russia. The music of Piotr I. Tchaikovsky, Modest Musorgsky and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov has become familiar to everyone. Then there are the plays of Anton Chekhov. I could go on in this vein at some length.

Alexander Pushkin has attained a somewhat Shakespeare-like status in Russian culture. Are political instability and the production of great art related?

Remarkably, the 20th century did not dim but only increased the Russian cultural achievement, even after the Bolsheviks came to power. Once more the tremendous creativity of the people seemed almost to thrive under adversity, both at home and in exile. Some of the key figures were Sergei Rachmaninov, Sergei Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich and Igor Stravinsky in music; ballet impresario Sergei Diaghilev; painter Kazimir Malevich; film director Sergei Eisenstein and writers Boris Pasternak and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Again it would be difficult to overstate the sheer magnitude of the Russian cultural achievement.

A dilemma

This presents something of a dilemma for me, as both a political scientist and a lover of the arts. I would personally prefer to live in an Anglo-Saxon democracy, with its deeply rooted sense of fair play and attention to procedure. I admit to being an admirer of the ancient English constitution (albeit with important qualifications), as bequeathed in some form to such countries as Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. I would much rather live in a country where particular governments come and go peacefully but where the business of government goes on minus the threat of periodic coups d'état or political assassinations.

At the same time, I am curiously drawn to a people that manifests such creativity under what would seem to be the most inhospitable conditions. I myself have found that I am most creative when I am suffering from one of my periodic bouts of depression. I wonder whether there is something similar at work in the Russian people. With Vladimir Putin returning to the Russian presidency by less than fully fair means, an old pattern seemingly continues. For centuries that country's rulers have been corrupt, autocratic, sometimes even murderous, yet the Russians themselves have managed to contribute hugely to what might be called world civilization. This gives the rest of us a large number of fine works of art and literature to enjoy while we are living under the benefits of a more stable constitution.

Perhaps one day Russia's political institutions will attain the resilience and durability of its cultural legacy. But we will likely have to await Putin's departure from the scene before that happens.

David T. Koyzis (dkoyzis@redeemer.ca) teaches politics at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ont., and has recently completed a book manuscript on authority, office and the image of God. His next project will likely be on the relationship between political culture and institutions.

Technically Speaking

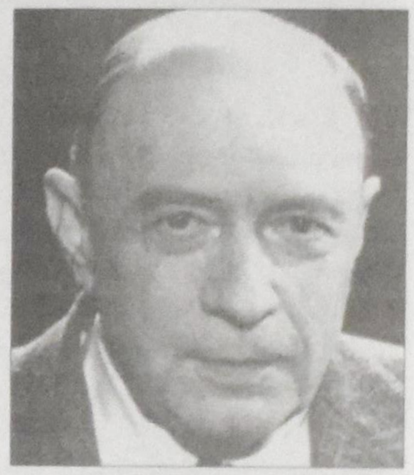
Derek Schuurman

Technique and the Church

Jacques Ellul, a 20th century French philosopher of technology, explored technology not in terms of artifacts, but as a way of thinking that he called *technique*. For Ellul, *technique* is a mindset in which all things are problems to be solved using efficient rational methods. The spirit of technique is one of the spirits of our age.

The worldview of *technique* has applied efficient methods to every field of human activity including procreation, birth, death, work and habitat. This mindset is so pervasive, that it has even been applied to the church. The attitude of technique is evident in the plethora of "how-to" books that promise proven methods for growing the church, developing leaders, expanding ministries, increasing giving and even steps to grow spiritually – as if such things could be reduced to a formula.

As an engineer, I was trained in a discipline that excels in reducing things to formulas. However, when I see churches adopting formulaic business and marketing practices, I get nervous. It's true that such tools can be helpful, but when they are brought to the table the mindset of technique is not far behind. The purpose of a church is very different from a business or an engineering firm. Both Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd identified the uniqueness of different spheres including schools, government, businesses, families and also the church. While many spheres have rational and economic aspects, their core functions are very different. There is a place for economic aspects in the church, and these are an important consideration when it comes to stewardship, but to ignore the core meaning of a sphere is to confuse its unique identity. Doing things decently and in good order is one thing, but the wholesale importing of business techniques into the church is full of pitfalls and potential consequences.



According to Jacques Ellul, "technique" – the belief that our problems can be solved using reason and efficiency – is one of the defining spirits of our age. Should we adopt this framework in the church?

Mission statements

Even something as seemingly benign as "mission statements" in churches is fraught with problems. Mission statements are a practice borrowed from the corporate world that have been enthusiastically embraced by many churches. While introspection and thoughtful planning are good, relying on mission statements as the path to success is misguided. A widget factory whose narrow focus is to make widgets can clearly articulate a mission statement highlighting their desire to make high-quality widgets. This approach is less appropriate when applied to the church, the body of Christ. Mission statements are problematic in the sense that they are often static documents that intentionally highlight certain things, and consequently under-emphasize other areas. Furthermore, mission statements could blind churches to new ministry opportunities that were never anticipated and which do not fit into existing strategic value statements. Who knows what surprising and fruitful directions might be missed? To be sure, the church has a mission – we are called to "make disciples" and to teach them (Matt. 28:19-20). Christ also gave us his example: "as the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). This is the mission of the church, expressed in a way that is open enough to encompass all the possibilities of what it means to do church.

We can have a "mission" and a "vision," but understanding our limits means cultivating humility and recognizing that our plans are tentative. At worst, when all things are run to comply strictly with a vision statement, it can border on idolatry. The book of James illustrates a more tentative posture to human plans (even in the field of business):

"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.... Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:13-15).

I think our vision statements need that same kind of humility. A tentativeness, an awareness of the spirit of technique that surrounds us with the appeal of rational methods, autonomy and control. The Spirit blows this way or that; we need to get in step with the Spirit, and we may very well be surprised.

Sometimes it seems that even though we are equipped with all the latest high-tech fishing gear, we are unable to catch many fish. If we can learn to discern the call of Jesus instructing us which side of the boat to cast our nets, we may be surprised at the resulting catch. We need to learn to recognize the spirit of technique in all its forms, also in the church, and replace it with a desire to walk humbly with our God.

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A silent film with a loud message

The Artist
written and directed by Michel Hazanavicius
Warner Brothers, 2011

Bethany Van Lingen

The Artist is a silent film, essentially about the end of silent film. It is a reminder of how quickly things change from generation to generation, even decade to decade. Movies have come a long way. They started out as black and white and silent; then moved to include sound, to make use of colour and, most recently, to pop out at the audience in 3D.

The Artist is a film lost in the past, but still the movie works for a tech-oriented, fast-paced audience. With charm, humour, snappy dance numbers and a puppy with numerous tricks up his sleeve, *The Artist*, currently in theatres, has loads of appeal for the cinephile and for the average movie-goer. The reason that we go to the movies, after all – the magic, the escapism – that has stayed the same.

It's Hollywood, 1927, and George Valentin (played by Jean Dujardin) is a silent film star at his prime. Valentin is iconic with perfectly styled hair and moustache, as well as his playful sidekick, Jack Russell terrier, Uggie. In the opening scene of *The Artist*, Valentin runs onstage after the premiere of his own movie and takes a bow before his adoring audience, who respond with wild, unending applause. Valentin is a man sure of his own talents and charm. But the pride of Valentin goes before a fall. As silent films give way to "talkies," Valentin refuses to surrender to the end of silent film, nor accept his decreasing popularity in the face of a new generation of talking film stars.

Peppy Miller (played by Bérénice Bejo) is one of these new stars. Valentin brings the young dancer to fame, pulling Miller into a photo op with the press, then pulling strings to get her cast as a chorus girl in what will be Valentin's last successful silent movie. Miller rises to new fame, as Valentin loses it all. As Miller walks up the stairs to sign a film contract for the talkies, Valentin leaves his producer's office. His producer has just fired him.

Valentin tries to relive his glory days by using his fortune to produce his own silent movie. The movie fails miserably, opening on the same day as Miller's new talkie and at the same time as the 1929 stock market crash. Valentin loses everything after the flop. His wife kicks him out. Valentin and Uggie move into an apartment along with Valentin's butler, whom Valentin can't afford to pay. Valentin struggles with alcoholism and eventually must auction off his own belongings. He is a ruined man.

It's a classically tragic story, told simply and silently. Silent movies were a technology soon replaced, just as the mediums with which we are so comfortable now will become outdated and unneeded. As our world blazes ahead, continually changing, we must re-evaluate, much like the silent actor at the dawn of talkies, or become irrelevant.

We no longer pursue silent film on a grand scale. Because silent film has become so outdated, *The Artist*'s director, Michel Hazanavicius, should never have been taken seriously when he talked about making a silent film. But nostalgia for old world film won out over the sheer difficulty of storytelling through images alone and the challenge of creating a gripping story without words. So, creating a silent film was a greater challenge for the actors, who, like their audience, were used to movies with lots of dialogue. The actors had to show the feelings of their characters, through expression and action, rather than use lines to hint at a character's emotions.

Despite these unique challenges, *The Artist* was filmed in 35 days. The movie was shot at a speed of 22 frames per second, rather than the standard 24 frames per second. It was also filmed with square shots, rather than the rectangular crop of modern movies. These changes gave the movie a silent film feel, as well as slightly speeding up the wordless action. The film won five Academy Awards, including for Best Picture, Best Director and Best Actor.

But *The Artist* is simply a break from the usual movie experience. The film does not call for the re-introduction of silent movies, but is rather a story told in a way that audiences have forgotten. The film reminds us of the charms of the past and warns us not to forget both the joy and necessity of remembering. It seems the magic of a well-told story will always remain the same.

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New life and old clichés

With Love
by Rosie Thomas
Studio Litho, 2011

Nick Schuurman

We can't blame her.

Romantic love, so often experienced, and so often a subject for which words have been attempted, is going to result in clichéd love songs. It's inevitable, and I, for one, don't mind. Rosie Thomas, now 34, has become an unlikely and quirky fixture of the indie music scene, and has, over the past several years, managed to write no few love songs.

With Love, Thomas' sixth studio album, follows a four year gap since her last record, *A Very Rosie Christmas*. "In the music industry, every year is like dog years," she wrote, in a statement accompanying her most recent album, "so I guess it's been more like 28 years, and a lot has happened in that time." This collection of songs is, in part, an effort to make sense of everything she has experienced in those four years. This struggle to put history to music is seen most clearly in "A Really Long Year," in which Thomas recalls, practically verbatim, the major shifts that her life has seen these past several months: "Laura had a baby boy while I was travelling in Germany / Mother lost her friend in summertime...."

The album was given pre-production support by Sam Beam, known also by his own folk songs which he writes and performs as Iron and Wine, and David Bazan, formerly of Pedro the Lion. Both Beam and Bazan, she explains, encouraged her to do three things, "Belt it out ... bring in more of your personality, and more soul." While *With Love* sounds, on first listen, like more of the same from Thomas, that she has followed her friends' advice is evident. Fans who have, until now, known Rosie for her whispered vocals and stripped-down chord progressions (think Joni Mitchell and Judy Collins) may be a bit surprised that the album sounds more like something from their mother's record collection (regarding this new direction, she has confessed her love of Bette Midler).

During the course of the writing the album, Thomas stepped out of Seattle, her usual creative niche. Much of the projcet was birthed in Los Angeles, as well as on the farm where her grandfather (with whom, in the song "A Really Long Year," she tenderly remembers dancing on her wedding day) lives. It was at the latter that she was married: "we had a parade, a carnival and fireworks. I wore my mother's wedding dress. It was all terribly charming." During the course of the last year, Thomas has decided to move once again, and following a tour with Iron and Wine, has now settled in New York.

If *With Love* comes across as just another collection of clichéd sentimentalisms, it may help to understand the context out of which the album was birthed. Thomas suffered a major thyroid disorder, and was, as result, subject to extreme anxiety that caused her to be bed-ridden, cancel shows and "drop two pants sizes." "I cried on my birthday," she sings in "Two Worlds Collide," "was broken to pieces, and everyone noticed." And yet, there was, out of this intense suffering that took some two years to work through, born something new and hopeful. "It was like a great awakening," she writes regarding this resurrection, "I arose one morning and I was back ... the songs were bigger, the melodies moved quicker and I even sang of love gained – not just of love lost this time."

And yet the shadow of that suffering remains; most of the album's choruses are punctuated by question marks. There is at once an innocence and a depth to Rosie Thomas that makes her something of a musical paradox. It comes as no surprise then that the Michigan native also performs as Sheila Saputo as part of a solo comedy show. She can, at once sing cliché-heavy lines like, "When I am walking with you, feels like I'm walking on clouds" ("Over the Moon"), along with some of the most poetic, haunting verses, like that of "Like Wildflowers": "If I place my hope in all things that pass away, what have I shown for myself?"

Give the album a chance. While it is not her strongest effort yet, it just might win you over.

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No place to lay my head

Not just a scenic windbreak.

Mary Ann Benjamims

Eight or 10 fat old fir trees line a street, looking on a newly-groomed portion of Brantford's revitalized downtown core. As children, my sister and I played in a stand of pines just like these – heaping up the soft sweet-smelling needles to fashion walls for our imaginary home. So it's not unexpected that these pines serve a similar purpose here in Brantford, though it's not a child who has staked out a home under the trees. As a volunteer, my husband Ken stumbled upon the makeshift residence as he stooped to collect garbage. It was immediately obvious that one cluster of the stately trees served as someone's sleeping area. Several flattened cardboard boxes and a few scattered blankets made up the bedroom and several feet away a second cluster of spruce, the "facilities," the large needled boughs easily providing shelter from prying eyes. Prime real-estate – if you are homeless. And though I can see the rolling hills of a farmer's field from my back window, that stand of pines is less than a two-minute drive from my house. Homelessness hits a lot closer to home than I thought.

Homelessness, whether life under a tree or in sub-standard housing one step away from eviction, is closer than we all want to believe. The homeless are teens, who regularly avoid going home because the conditions there are unsafe, or victims of mental illness or addiction sleeping on a friend's couch two days here and three days there, or seniors on a fixed income who sacrifice heat and groceries to keep a roof over their heads. Though not all of these people are strictly homeless, they have no haven of safety.

Paired issues: homelessness and poverty

According to Brantford's Community Advisory Board on Homeless Issues, "about 17.6 percent of the total population have incomes below the poverty line." Poverty parallels homelessness. J. David Hulchanski, professor at the University of Toronto, states, "Starting in the 1980s it was clear that homelessness referred to a poverty that includes being unhoused. It is a poverty that means being without required social supports." Without those supports, many people spend time "couch hopping from friend to friend – not absolutely homeless, but with no security and often no safety."

Do they have a place to sleep?

In the basement of a local church on a Saturday afternoon Bob sits down for a meal. Fresh hot chili served by volunteers like me is the main dish on the menu, but donated Little Caesar's pizzas, grilled cheese sandwiches and hot coffee are served on the side. On any given Saturday you can find 35 to 60 guests like Bob, men, women and children dropping in for a bite to eat.

Some of the patrons sit off to the side – the sour smell of unwashed body wafts toward me from one young man. He says little and rocks in place as he meticulously avoids eye contact. A few tables over a group of men in a patchwork of clothing and long matted beards laugh together, camaraderie lighting their eyes. Near the back sits a clean-shaven gentleman in a leather jacket. He glances away nervously when I serve him. His shoulders twitch, almost as if he wonders how he managed to find himself a client at a soup kitchen. A father and son sit nearby – the father's gaunt features and the smell of alcohol on his breath don't negate the love in his voice as he jokes about his teenage son's voracious appetite.

Some of these people who are homeless prefer their existence on the streets. Mental illness and its accompanying paranoia keep them isolated from society around them. A few of the teens have a hideaway under a bridge near the casino. The only access is a rope they use to climb up and under. Others have spent years lost in the grip of alcohol or drug addiction. When they finally raise their heads above that monster, they've lost everything, living a hand to mouth existence. When offered a hot meal, each individual is eager to partake, but they're still polite and dignified. The same courteous "please" and "thank you" sound from everyone.

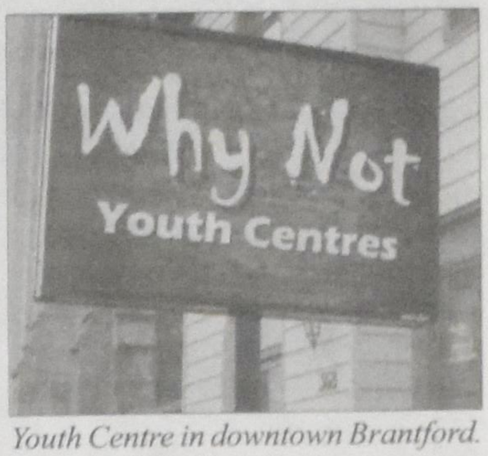
Beyond stereotypes

I sit down to chat with Bob. His clothes are mismatched layers of sweaters and shirts. The smell of alcohol is on his breath, but he is jovial when I sit down to chat to with him. I ask Bob about his family and he shakes his head, his lips pursed. "I haven't heard nothing from my kids for years. Can you believe it? Then just yesterday my boy, he calls me." Bob acknowledges no responsibility for the broken relationship, yet longs for a connection to his family. He waits for them to come to him, sad when they don't, yet unable to begin that path to healing himself. Some of the clients in the room seem to embody exactly what I'd always imagined about homelessness, but, as Bob demonstrates, there are really no typecasts of homelessness – each individual has a story, has travelled a painful road to land a seat in that basement.

When I ask volunteer Pam about the path to homelessness, she hesitates, then slowly replies, "It's complicated. Often there are a number of problems that converge and tip people over the edge, to the place where they find themselves without a home. A job loss, addiction, divorce, on the one hand or those with underlying mental illness whose families finally give up on the other. But whatever the path to homelessness, often people stay there because they become used to it – it's a lifestyle they can predict."

Small steps, local love

Trevor Beecraft, director with Why Not Youth Centre for at-risk youth in Brantford's downtown core, knows this path personally. He lived on the streets as a teen and now works with kids in the same place. Beecraft says, "It's not that many of these kids don't have shelter, but, more importantly, they have no support in place and no safety." Couch-hopping and drug and alcohol abuse are preferred to the physical and sexual abuse that is all too common at home. His clients are teens who themselves often struggle with a range of mental disabilities – everything from ADHD, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and fetal alcohol syndrome. Trevor laments, "Many of these kids have no chance even at the starting line." Because of the risks at home, these same kids avoid sleeping there – seeking temporary respite elsewhere, but all too often ending up in ever worsening situations. The simple truth is that most of his clients have no one who loves them or has a stake in their future. "I've been a pall bearer three times now. Three kids who believed the lie that they are unlovable and that no one cares," says Beecraft. Unfortunately, if they survive teenage years, many never escape the pall of homelessness.



Youth Centre in downtown Brantford.

Research demonstrates that the solutions to homelessness remain as complicated as the problem. But perhaps the first step to change must begin in our hearts, embracing a better understanding of those affected and reaching out a hand in love. As believers we can partner with community organizations and in so doing build the kingdom of God, often in small, perhaps even imperceptible, ways. Many public and para-church organizations are working together to effect change. Women's shelters, youth centres, housing resources, and respite for homeless families – all these services work together to help alleviate and eliminate the root causes of homelessness. Beecraft has learned to measure success in small increments, like a teen showing off her prom dress at the centre, finding a family connection there.

When a volunteer at a newly-opened youth centre in Paris solicited a local shop owner for donations, he was surprised when the manager thanked him. Since the opening of the centre, his dumpster hasn't been lit on fire, demonstrating the power of change and hope. And, although it sounds cliché, this is how Trevor Beecraft focuses his efforts – encouraging others to counter homelessness with love. Offer a smile to sullen teens on the street who don't believe in their own intrinsic value – it might be the only one they get that week. Volunteer a few hours in a local soup kitchen or donate money, food or toiletries. And pray.

At Christmas, a street kid decorated his first tree – he was 18. This tough teenager then sat tracing the features of Piglet, of Winnie-the-Pooh fame, in his first colouring book ever, a crayon between his thick fingers, regaining a sliver of a childhood. Like those who work at that youth centre, we all have the opportunity to make a difference in the realm of homelessness. We can't allow the beauty of a cluster of trees blind us to the struggle hidden beneath its boughs. Poverty and homelessness are a *local* problem. As believers, we can be part of the solution. Reach out a hand in love.

Mary Ann Benjamins is a supply teacher, writer and Awards Manager for The Word Guild. *Find her blog,* My Father's Daughter, *at* **maryannbenjamins.wordpress.com**. *MaryAnn's story about her cancer survival can be found in* A Second Cup of Hot Apple Cider: Words to Stimulate the Mind and Delight the Spirit.

When do you call the cops?

Rodney J. Hugen

When do you call the cops? When is the menace real? Sometimes the decision is easy. My neighbor threatens his girlfriend with a baseball bat. He smashes the windows in her car. Glass shatters everywhere and he yells his threats from the front yard loud enough for the whole neighborhood to hear. I call the police. They come with lights flashing and sirens blaring and take him into custody. For the moment the problem is solved. The threat is over.

But then there is Shane. Shane suffers from schizophrenia and is part of our church community. When he takes his medication as prescribed, he is generous, kind and a joy to be around. However, he hates his medications and he resists taking them. When he is not taking them, he rants and raves against the "system." He threatens to rob Fort Knox or believes that he is the president of Bolivia. He seems scary to others and makes even those of us who know him well quite uncomfortable. But we who know him know to call his sister or his case worker or his psychiatrist and once again he goes back on his medication and things settle down, at least until the next incident. We don't call the authorities every time Shane threatens to take down the international monetary supply or decides that he wants to raise up the Bolivian army in order to rule the world. We recognize he suffers from mental illness and we walk with him because we know and love him. To involve the authorities every time he has an outburst would mean an awful lot of phone calls, so we make decisions about whether or not he is capable of carrying out his threats. We don't always make these decisions wisely.

The day comes when Shane says he is going to shoot up the church over some perceived or real event. He leaves almost incoherent rambling messages on the phone and sends frightening e-mails. Suddenly church leaders are confronted with what to do? Should we call the police? Should we get an order of protection? Our hearts are still tender, we are full of compassion, and we hate to get the authorities involved. We want to imagine that a change of medication will fix the problem. We hope he will just cycle out of his current state as he has in the past. It is hard to pick up the telephone and call 911 knowing that Shane's circumstances will change dramatically and not necessarily for the better. The truth is that we don't want to entrust Shane to the health care and legal systems. Deep inside we think we know better how to care for Shane because we think we love him better than others can. And in some very real ways we do.

What is freedom?

So, when do we call the cops? How bad does it have to get? Shane has been in the "system" for a long while. He is court ordered to take medications. The police will come and get him and take him to the mental health hospital or clinic. They will hold him for a few days and adjustments will be made to his care plan and he will be released. Short of a miraculous intervention by God, he will continue to struggle with the disease and likely his behaviors will deteriorate even further. We seldom institutionalize people anymore. We want them to be "free," but their freedom is a false one at best.

At the request of brokenhearted family members, I once made my way downtown to find their son, who was homeless and mentally ill and whom they hoped was still sitting outside a McDonalds near the university. I found him and told him that his family would love to see him again and that I would help him with a bus ticket home if he was interested in going. He talked to me about how free he was to roam and ride the trains, how he hated the medications the family demanded he be on, and that he really didn't want to give up his freedom. At some point he said he was hungry, so I responded, "Let's go in and get a hamburger." He told me he wasn't allowed in the store and was banned from most of the restaurants in the area because of previous bad behaviors. I asked him how free he really was if he couldn't even walk into McDonalds to eat. In tears he agreed, and so I went in alone and bought him a burger and then drove him to the bus station. I sat with him until he boarded the bus. No one sat near us. The lady who sold me the ticket asked if he was okay. I didn't know how to respond. Is he truly free? Setting boundaries and restricting freedoms can sometimes be a very freeing thing for those struggling with mental illness. Allowing people to do whatever they wish seldom is.

Costly freedom.

Tough love

Every time we have to call the police it is a judgment call. It is a judgment call made by people who are not professionals and who do not necessarily know what to do. We gather with the ones who know Shane best and we involve as many people as possible. We seek to come to agreement about the actual threat. Is the current threat markedly different than previous threats? Is there a way to involve doctors and care providers so that it does not exacerbate an already dangerous situation? We're pretty sure he can't take down the international money supply, but we know that he can get his hands on a weapon, so, if he is threatening to shoot up the church, we take it very seriously. We call the cops. A wise pastor friend suggests that asking the law enforcement authorities to engage is allowing others with less clouded judgment to look in with unbiased eyes and maybe see what we maybe can't see because we are too close. That is a good reminder. It is an opportunity to trust that God loves Shane and that we must trust Shane's care to him.

After calling the police, our relationship with the person who is mentally ill changes. It is likely that she or he no longer trusts us. There may be hurt and resentment once he or she is released. We may not be able to have further interaction. The police may instruct us to secure restraining orders and to call them should she or he come near. When Jimmy threatened to kill my co-pastor's family and subsequently pulled a knife on me after our church service, we secured a restraining order and he was no longer permitted to have any contact with us. We had one court-arranged meeting with him and the psychiatrist entrusted with his care. It was a difficult and painful meeting as we shared our love and our fears with him and with the doctor. Jimmy wept and told us he was sorry and asked us to help him and let him come back once he got back on his medications. However, he continued to be detained, treated, and released until he was eventually arrested and convicted on burglary and other charges. After his release from prison, he again contacted us and we reported the contact to his parole officer and he went back to prison. It is heartbreaking because we long for him to be healed and to be loved and to be a part of our community once again. As with Shane, Jimmy was a model of Christlikeness when he took his medication. The broken relationship is hard for us who grew to love and care for him. Yet the safety of our community is at stake.

Loving those who are hard to love

I live in the city of Tucson where several people were killed and our Congresswoman, Gabrielle Giffords, was shot and horribly wounded by someone who from all accounts suffered from severe mental health issues. There is much regret that something was not done earlier to try to reach out and help this young man. One wonders what more could have been done? Many of his college instructors and acquaintances did do the right things, but he still fell through the cracks. A friend of mine tells me that I don't want to be on the witness stand at some trial in the future trying to explain to the weeping victims of a tragedy why I ignored such an obvious threat to their loved ones. He is right, of course. It is better to err on the side of reporting quickly rather than to assume that we know best how to care for those who might be a threat to the community. I can't imagine the pain of witnessing a horrific tragedy that might have been prevented had I simply made a phone call.

When do you call the cops? It is a complex question and it is one that any church that brings the gospel to hurting people will eventually face. It is good to familiarize yourself with what the particular laws of your community are around mandatory reporting. It is good to become aware of the various agencies and organizations that provide help and support for those who suffer from mental illness. It is wise to seek help quickly from those who have expertise in the field. You should as far as you are able establish relationships with family and friends of the individual who is suffering from mental health issues. It is also helpful to know their doctors and medical caseworkers. It is good to pray and to plead for help to the God who loves and heals those to whom you minister. Loving people well is to protect them lovingly from themselves. Loving those who are hard to love is one of our callings as followers of Jesus. Learning when to call the cops is a way of loving well.

Rod Hugen (thevillageparson@crchurches.net) is a pastor at The Village and also a church planter working for Classis Arizona (CRC).

Features

CC is pleased to present a four-part series on the topic of pacifism. Our guest writers offer perspectives that are independent of each other and provide a dynamic cross-disciplinary juxtaposition. Bert den Boggende, historian, takes us through the centuries, surveying Christian attitudes about pacifism. Brent van Staalduinen, writer, offers reflection and opinion based on his experiences in the military and teaching overseas in Kuwait and South Korea. We encourage our readers to offer their feedback by way of a letter to the editor (editor@christiancourier.ca) or comments online at **christiancourier.ca**.

The danger of passivism

Brent van Staalduinen

I'm certainly not alone in this, but my heart grows ever heavier as I watch the deterioration of Iraq and Afghanistan. Nor am I surprised – the entrenched nature of tribalism and the rise of fundamentalist and extremist Islam have made it virtually impossible for progressives to move forward. Despite the oft-heard refrain, "what people in the region truly want is peace," the power lies practically and religiously with those who don't believe in peace, progress and stability. As I write this, Afghanistan's president is reaching out to the Taliban, and Iraqi politicians are openly courting the tribal and Islamic militants within their own borders.

My thoughts go first to the soldiers who left so much of themselves in those desperate places, establishing infrastructure and political process, fighting corruption, and beating back the abomination of militant Islam. And then my thoughts turn to the families and loved ones of the soldiers who perished, and I ask myself what truly has been gained. I must confess that my instinctual response is simple: nothing.

And that breaks my heart.

But inevitably, my thoughts also turn to those for whom those heroes died, the voiceless farmers who would love nothing more than to work their fields in freedom. The residents of battle-scarred towns and cities who want to enjoy the benefits of infrastructure and stability. The women who look out from behind locked doors, through their shameful veils and burkas, for the chance to vote. I think of the girls who wait for the chance to go to school, to learn about choices, free from the danger of being traded like chattels or treated like animals.

And I know that even when we fail, there is victory in the trying, even if it comes at great cost. I know that we have to do something, even if it means extending our arm against the oppressors. I know that those who strive to make peace are indeed blessed and will be called the sons of God.

Making Peace

Too often, our discussions of pacifism turn on that line between violent and non-violent action, or on outdated and narrow definitions of what constitutes just and unjust war. We try to make decisions about whether or not we would participate in said conflicts based on obscure theological tomes and a Eurocentric mindset honed by two horrific world wars.

I won't say that the world has changed – our fallen natures care nothing for history – but our understanding of conflict certainly has. Gone are pitched battles waged across vast tracts of land, where great armies face off in the name of nation and religion. Arrived are micro-conflicts bringing to our consciousness such phrases as insurgency, guerilla-style action, suicide bombings, ethnic cleansing, warlord armies, Islamic militants, genocide, human rights violations. Gone too is the idea that we can or should go to war to protect our own homes and shores; arrived is the question of serving in far-off lands in conflicts bathed in grey.

"War" by the traditional definition, therefore, is dead. So how do we make peace – *make* peace – as we are called to do, in such a world? How do we decide when and where to extend the point of the military spear? March or sit in peaceful protest? Serve with humanitarian organizations in dusty, foreign places? Should we stay safe at home or give ourselves for the good of others who are – and aren't – like us?

Perhaps we need to shift away from abstract discussions and towards a concrete approach to being salt and light in a world that preys on the weak and innocent. Perhaps we need to focus on the humanity of conflict, and focus our efforts on framing our response in active, actionable terms. Perhaps when we spend too much time trying to theologize our response, there is the very real danger of acceding to passivism – doing nothing in a tragic misinterpretation of Jesus' challenge to offer the other cheek.

"Offer," though, is an active word that requires decision and movement – we cannot offer ourselves without standing close to those who would strike out. Often, when we are numbed by the very scale of right and wrong or obstinate in our pursuit of the perfect debate, our instinct is to do nothing at all. This is wrong. When we retreat into our churches and communities without making an active effort to help, whether in the fight against injustice here or overseas, we commit heresy on a grand and tragic scale.

There can be no passivity in the pursuit of making peace. The Bible calls us to live in peace with everyone, when it is possible, and as far as it depends on us. And so often it depends *entirely* on us, both in what we do for each other and for the least of our nearly seven billion siblings.

But even though we want peace, living in peace is not always possible, leaving us to discern an appropriate and effective response. Therein lies one of the greatest and most troubling realities of the faith we profess – that sometimes the answers, while guided by scripture, can in the end be found only in ourselves. We are called to choose, decide and act for ourselves and for those who cannot help themselves. Actively. Prayerfully. Mercifully. Humbly. Lovingly. And, at times, violently.

And accept the consequences, as tragic as they sometimes are.

Read more about Brent van Staalduinen and his work at **brentvans.com**. *He lives in Hamilton, Ont.*

Towards a theology of pacifism

Bert den Boggende

Reinhold Niebuhr, around 1930 chairman of the American Fellowship of Reconciliation, recanted his utopian and optimistic pacifism in the face of the rise of fascism and the outbreak of World War II, criticizing it in *Why the Christian Church is not Pacifist* (1940). Focussing on theology rather than texts, he examined sin, the kingdom of God, love, and the state, topics about which Christian pacifists differed among themselves.

Pacifists and sin

Niebuhr's blanket accusation that pacifists have a facile view of sin, failing to recognize the reality and power of evil inherent in human nature, is not valid for all pacifists. In 1914 the Presbyterian minister Richard Roberts, the key figure in the founding of the British Fellowship of Reconciliation, had already made a similar accusation, calling for a return to the core of original sin.

Pacifists and God's kingdom

Niebuhr and pacifists agree that peace belongs to God's kingdom, but then their ways part. According to Niebuhr, Jesus' perfect love transcended all historical possibilities and Jesus' ethics concerned the future perfect kingdom. Hence it was misguided to apply individual ethics to a collective political situation when circumstances sometimes necessitated force and war. In the process, he separated the sacred from the secular and socio-political ethics from religious ethics. Pacifists, rejecting this interim ethics and ethical relativism, call instead for passing absolute moral judgments on the methods of war. They hold that Christians are in the first place citizens of God's kingdom, showcasing what that kingdom is like to the world. While Calvinists also derive from Scripture absolute ethical principles applicable to historical situations, most, like Niebuhr, are unwilling to apply that principle to war.

Some pacifists, holding that the church is in the world to transform it into God's kingdom, have argued that they can usher in this kingdom. Others, recognizing the difficulty in implementing the absolutist ethic in a fallen world, acknowledge that implementation is not realizable within the bounds of history. Nevertheless, they hold that the belief in God's kingdom enables the church to proclaim the way of peace as a universal duty and privilege and that a Christian's continual task is bringing the natural order into correspondence with the supernatural. Unlike non-pacifists, both types of pacifists refuse to compromise the absolute perspective, pointing out that Jesus' way of the cross was a refusal to compromise with evil. Pacifists hold this absolute position because they strongly believe in the Holy Spirit's generative force in human life.

Pacifists and love

For pacifists, love, defined in the Sermon on the Mount as self-giving, non-calculating and non-retaliatory, is a suffering and absolute love. God's love is shown in the characteristic, redemptive way of overcoming evil through love and sacrifice. The church, the organ of God's kingdom, has the task to enthrone love in all relationships. Love is the key ingredient of God's kingdom. War, a violation of human dignity, is a betrayal of love by use of evil means. Pacifists hold that the means must be consistent with the end, making it impossible to war one's way to peace. Niebuhr agreed that love had ethical significance and was relevant, but argued that love was an impossible ideal. Pacifists, maintaining that this ideal can be implemented, often refer to Christ's love command, regarding this as a realistic rather than an idealistic policy.

Pacifists and the state

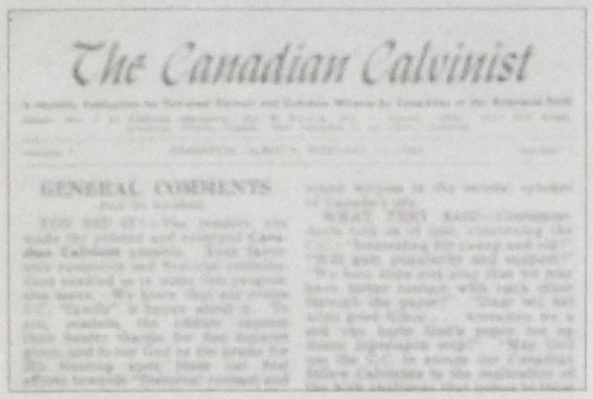
Niebuhr justified violence on pragmatic grounds, regarding war – preferring to call it anarchy – as nobler than and preferable to tyranny and refusing to go to war against a tyrant as entailing complicity in his tyranny and an encouragement of aggression. A tyrant's peace, he argued, had nothing to do with the peace of God's kingdom. In spite of this indictment, Niebuhr accepted pacifism as long as it admitted its inability to present practical solutions to political problems; otherwise, it was a heresy. Significantly, the World Council of Churches declared in 1948 that war was contrary to God's will.

Many pacifists, maintaining that pacifism is applicable to political situations, reject Niebuhr's argument that war is the lesser evil, viewing this argument as a

Dutch immigrant history and the *Christian Courier*

Harry Boonstra

The following is part one of a two-part essay on the Christian Courier *and its precursors. This first instalment focuses on language, the Dutch immigrant experience and the establishment of Christian schools.*



Christian Courier *predecessor 1946*

I recently worked on a project that directed me to early issues of the *Christian Courier* – issues that even preceded old man Witvoet (I know he's old because we shared the same college classes). Even a cursory perusal of the years 1945-1970 made for very interesting historical reading.

To begin with, the *Christian Courier* "names" and the language used are worth noting. A small, mimeographed (ask your parents or grandparents what "mimeographed" means) *Canadian Calvinist* appeared in Alberta in 1945, largely written by P.D.K. (Rev. Paul De Koekkoek). It was composed (on a manual typewriter) in English, and intended primarily for Dutch immigrants who had come to Western Canada from about 1900 to 1940. A competitor of sorts (*Contact*) appeared in 1949 in Ontario. It was written in Dutch, with its main readership the immigrants who came to (Eastern) Canada after 1945. The two papers were joined in 1951 as *Calvinist Contact*, with an impressive size of 20-plus pages. Its intent was to serve both Western and Eastern immigrants, both old-timers and new immigrants, but English disappeared from its pages since most of the readers had not (yet) mastered the language. English slowly made its reappearance, however, and by 1965 about one half of the articles were in Dutch; by 1980 this was reduced to 1-2 pages, and by 1990 only an occasional obituary appeared in Dutch. In 1992 *Calvinist Contact* was re-baptized as *Christian Courier*, with no more Dutch.

Just as the choice of language is a gauge of the lives of the immigrants, so is the choice of topics. One that especially caught my attention was several entries about "war brides." This echo of the end of World War II showed the plight of a (small) number of the immigrants, who had married Canadian army liberators. "Some even married Roman Catholics!" (12/1946). The churches tried to help these women who felt completely lost in Canada, but without much success.

The first years

A more common refrain was the story about the first year(s) in Canada: "*Ons Eerste Jaar* in Canada." The January 1951 issue began a long series that continued for many months. Such stories recalled in great detail the difficulties experienced by most immigrants. Many bemoaned the long, cold winters (as well as the hot summers). Others told of misunderstandings with their new boss – often including the refusal to work on Sundays. A family from Amsterdam was horrified that they had to build their own toilet – digging a hole and constructing a privy: "*We moesten zelfs een W.C. maken!! Wat een primitief land!*" On a more spiritual note, they yearned for spiritual companionship and a church. And, of course, the *heimwee*, the longing for family and friends left behind was a constant refrain.

Even though the immigrants' lives and experiences were now in Canada, the new country did not wipe out the old country from their minds or experience. Actually one could conduct a study in acculturation (Canadiazation?) just from the pages of the *Calvinist Contact*. Among the many adjustments the need to learn English was, in some ways, the most complicated. Every immigrant could tell funny or embarrassing stories of mispronunciation or miscommunication. My own example: Two months after arriving in Ontario I had to visit a physician (I can't even remember the ailment). At one point the conversation went like this:

Doctor: "Have you had bowel movements?"

Harry: "What you mean, Sir?"

Doctor: "I mean BM. I mean, did you shit?'"

Harry: "Oh yes, Sir! Much movement and shit!"

Actually, *Calvinist Contact* illustrates some of the language mix. Let me cite just a few examples from the advertisements in the December 1951 issue. I found only one ad written completely in English: "Welcome to Canada. From Curry's Drug Store. Brockville, Ontario." Some were completely in Dutch: "*Voor al uw verzekeringen (Algemeen, levens, brand, en ongevallen). Immigranten: Wij spreken uw taal.*" Most were a mixture of Dutch and English: *Gebruikte Cars en Trucks*. Or: "Beautiful shirts and *goede onderbroeken*.

Worried about wolves

The immediate need for work opportunity was also a frequent refrain in the early years. Sometimes a Canadian sponsor had a job waiting for the immigrant. Just as often the doughty "fieldmen" or the equally helpful early ministers travelled from farm to farm, telling the Canadian farmer that here was a Dutch family (father, mother, six or seven strapping offspring) who could provide all the essential work. Even though many of the immigrants had never worked on a farm before (they may have been bookkeepers or teachers), the initial jobs tended to be in agriculture. The *Contact* tried to assist them with many articles about farming, such as "Een Verkennings Tocht" – exploring northern Ontario, minimizing the incredible obstacles and holding out a promising future (10/9/1949). A worried reader wrote a letter with one question, "Are there wolves in the Cochrane area?"

1964

But the immigrants knew that they should not live by bread-winning alone, and that their families, especially their children, needed careful attention. This attention soon began to focus on their education. Canadian elementary and secondary schools were the subject of deep and bitter controversy in the early 1950s. Since the beginning of public education, most Canadians considered their schools to be minimally Christian and Protestant – schools where the children were at least taught honesty, politeness and other virtues. By the 1950s even this general moral education was questioned, as the debate about "child centered education" took central stage. Even though the immigrants were not much involved in this debate, they knew that the local public school was not at all like *De School met de Bijbel* where there children had previously been educated.

The very first issue of *The Canadian Calvinist* opened with three brief articles about the establishment of Christian schools: "CONGRATULATIONS Lacombe. It is reported that your Christian school building is almost completed and that you engaged a teacher for the coming school term" (8/6/1945). The building was often a cement block creation, but enthusiasm in the community ran high. From then on through the following decades, virtually every issue of the paper dealt with some aspect of these schools. Even though other issues (such as a Christian labour union or a Christian university) evoked pro and con arguments, hardly ever does one read about opposition to the Christian school movement.

Part two of this essay will appear in the April 23 issue of CC, and will focus on the founding of churches and church organizations.

Harry Boonstra is a Calvin College Theological Librarian emeritus and, in a former life, a harvester of onions in the Holland Marsh. Unlike much of the rest of the world, he still reads books and journals.

Pacifism ... *continued from p 12*

depreciation of the horrors and sinfulness of war, not factual, and based on moral fallacy. Those pacifists holding that the state is of God view the state's task as establishing and maintaining order and justice. While recognizing that there may be a tension between loyalty to God and loyalty to the state, they nevertheless reject the (Lutheran) dualism, which by separating the sacred from the secular makes the state supreme in civic affairs while relegating faith and grace to the private, spiritual life. Pacifists view such dualism, which reduces salvation to an individual affair irrelevant to society, as a major factor preventing the churches' acceptance of pacifism.

Pacifists and peace

In rejecting the Munich Pact, the British Fellowship of Reconciliation signalled that pacifists are not necessarily appeasers. Political peace, these pacifists argued, should not be equated with God's peace. Regarding war as a ruinous social sin, a destructive symptom of a disease affecting every part of the body of mankind, pacifists reject the effectiveness of war as a means to peace. The church, through the proclamation of the Gospel of Peace, should educate people's minds for a truly Christian peace, modelled on the Prince of Peace and based on right relationships, justice, freedom and good will. Such a peace, pacifists believe, is possible because the Holy Spirit regenerates people and because Christ has commanded his followers to be perfect. Moreover, they interpret the *Nicene Creed* statement that Christ's kingdom shall have no end as a present reality in process of fulfilment rather than a future eschatological event with the victory over evil postponed till the Second Coming. Peace is the result of a slowly maturing fruit of love, not the absence of war. No scheme of deterrence could therefore produce peace. Rather than asking "Will pacifism work?" non-pacifist Christians need to consider first of all Christ's way before considering the state's predicament.

Bert den Boggende has a PhD in British history and is a retired teacher. He lives in Brooks, Alberta.

Columns

Roots and Wings

Emily Cramer

This side of Easter

This past month I had to face something I wasn't prepared to deal with for many years: the possibility of losing my mother. Within a month she went from seemingly healthy and active senior to hospitalized cardiac patient, and as I sat with a number of family members in the ICU waiting room the day of her surgery, all I could think of was the member of her church congregation who had died the previous week during the same procedure. And of a friend's mother who was dying at that very moment on the floor above us.

Thank God, my mom's life was spared, at least for now; she is recovering at home, and the immediate danger is behind us. But the experience has set me on a journey of separation I feel unprepared to write about and yet can think of little else. One day, I *will* lose her, and it may be sooner than I expected. How is one to deal with such a loss? In a stoic email to my cousin, I wrote that I had been reminded to cling to God and not to people. But do I do that? Is it even possible? My life would be dramatically impoverished without this wise, loving, faith-filled example walking ahead of me. And her love, however human, is so much more perceptible, tangible, than God's.

There is no way to tie a concluding knot on this topic. The struggle with mortality is my human inheritance, one I have only just begun to realize. I expect to battle it out for many years and then again, anew, when the loss finally happens. But I think a gentle preparation has begun through this scare and through several ideas that have brought comfort.

Part of a verse from Psalm 139 has been lingering: "When I awake, I am still with you" (18b, NIV). It is almost counterintuitive. Wouldn't it seem that we are more clearly with God when we *are* awake and conscious? If you put the emphasis on *still*, there is a powerful implication that we are more obviously with God when we are not awake, not in control of ourselves. I love that. All through the night I am held closely by God, warmed by his living breath, more alive in my unconsciousness and closer to him in my unknowing. All through my mom's surgery she was not really on that steel table but lovingly kept by her watchful Father. I was able to look her in the face during that last pre-op visit and say, "When you awake, Mom … on whichever side that turns out to be."

More fully alive

My mom also used to tell of a story she read by a woman who had clinically died during surgery. She didn't want to come back even though a Voice or a Light or whatever it was she experienced told her it was not yet her time. In several of his books, C.S. Lewis speculates about dying – that we become more fully alive than we ever were on earth.

This reminds me of a striking analogy I heard in a sermon. The speaker had been struggling with death and the lack of biblical substantiation of heaven. Then she thought of a mother trying to describe the world to an unborn baby: "Soon, little one, you will be born into this wonderful world, and you will be able to feel the spring sunshine on your skin. What is sunshine? It is light from a great ball of fire in the sky. And what is light? Yes, I suppose you don't have much of it there in the watery darkness. Well how about this: soon you will hear the birds singing. But wait, you don't know what a bird is. In fact, you don't even really know what it is to hear, apart from the distant rumbling and thumping of my body. Ah little one, when you are born you will see my face, and we will be together. But you've never seen a face before. You

A useful analogy for Christians: our relationship to death is like a baby in the womb trying to comprehend the world they're about to be born into.

feel comfortable and safe where you are, and there is no language that can help you understand what is to come. But I promise that when you have arrived – even if there is some struggle, some pain in the process – you will never want to go back."

I don't know that I will ever stop clinging to my loved ones. It is human to cling and to grieve when sin brings about the separation we sense should never be. With Job, I would love to be able to bless the Lord in both his giving and his taking, but it is a lofty aspiration from this low altitude. So at least let me remember to bless his giving and seek his peace when the season for taking comes.

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches at Georgian College. She is currently devouring her book club's latest pick, Have a Little Faith, *by Mitch Albom.*

My Window Seat

Mendelt Hoekstra

Friendship

Last week I was invited to help out at a Friendship Ministries group in Dunnville, Ont. I was invited to lead the music worship part of the evening. Although I was happy to receive the invitation, it meant another night away from the family plus a 45 minute drive there and 45 minute drive home. But because I have a relatively difficult time saying "no" and also believe those who are given gifts should share, I decided I would go and bless others. I would soon be humbled.

Friendship Ministries is a not-for-profit organization that exists to help churches and organizations around the world share God's love with people who have intellectual disabilities. Dunnville is a rural town in Southern Ontario with a population of 6,000 people. The group meets in the dated basement of a local weathered church. The chairs are lacquered wood and hard plastic. The chairs are in a "U" formation wrapped around a piano and screen, projector and a stack of sheets. When I walked in I was enthusiastically greeted by Nick. Nick's smile said "come in and stay awhile." His sports cap matched his suit jacket and his name tag hung on his chest like a badge. He shook my hand with both his hands and a loud and welcoming "Hello!" I replied "Hi Nick, it's nice to meet you." He asked me if he could carry my guitar and before I could answer, took it from my hand and brought it to the piano. He then immediately went to Margaret, the leader of the group and proudly shared with Margaret that I knew his name. "He knows who I am! He called me by my name!"

People were coming in, nearly all greeting someone enthusiastically. As the table with name tags slowly became bare, Margaret called for the start of the meeting. Very few heard this call as people were loud and still greeting each other. Margaret called again. I found my way to the piano. I was greeted by a gentleman decked out in Toronto Blue Jays bag, hat, shirt, jacket and pants. We spoke about the hope of the Jays making the post season this year. He told me he knows "lots and lots" about the Blue Jays.

A few people were sitting down at this time but the volume of the room was still high. I felt for Margaret. How was she going to get everyone to sit down so she could start the program? Then a remarkable thing happened. Margaret announced that we were going to start praying and that brought half of the group to their chairs. She and some other helpers physically took the other half of the group by the hand and brought them to their seats. Margaret announced "let's pray."

Friendship Ministries helps churches share God's love with people who have intellectual disabilities.

Prayer

The room quickly hushed and settled down. Margaret started at the one end of the row of seats. With her hands, she embraced the hands of the first person, Nick. "What do you want to pray about Nick?" Pointing at me, Nick replied "He knew my name, Mendelt knew my name!" Without missing a beat, Margaret prayed "Thank you Lord. Thank you that Nick could meet a new friend tonight and thank you that you know us all by name, that you write our name on the palm of your hand." Nick sat, head bowed, eyes closed and physically still. He stayed still while Margaret blessed him and moved to the next person. "What do you want to pray about?" asked Margaret. "I went to a restaurant last week!" The room stayed quiet. Margaret prayed out loud so everyone could hear and silently join in.

Person by person, Margaret offered to pray with them or welcomed them to pray themselves. She went to each and every person in the group, hand in hand, close in body and spirit. Halfway through the group a young woman decided to pray herself. She knew the scriptures well and quoted many passages. She reminded the group that Jesus died for all our sins and that people mocked him on the cross and we are like those people. She went on to tell the group that we are not worthy of the grace given to us, and then she went one step further and told the group that we are worthless and that we "know nothing." The Blue Jays fan beside me grabbed my knee and reassured me by telling me that he "knows lots about the Blue Jays." I was comforted.

The beauty in the group amazed me. A cement block basement, honky-tonk piano, old time projector with transparent sheets and markers and people; real and beautiful people. People who are the hands and feet of Jesus and bless others by being with them. I went into the group planning on blessing but walked away being abundantly blessed. The young woman was correct, I knew nothing.

Mendelt Hoekstra (mendelt.hoekstra@gmail.com) is the director of the Music Therapy Program at Bethesda. He lives near St. Catharines, Ont.

Columns

The Public Square

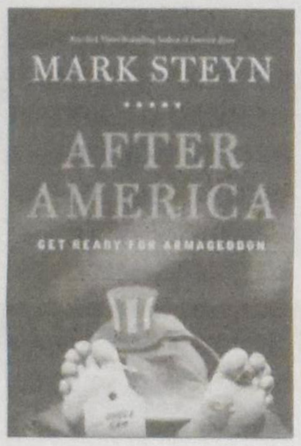
Harry Antonides

After America

The ominous-sounding title of this book may steer some away from Mark Steyn's warnings of the grave dangers facing America – and the rest of the still-free world. But if they are prepared for an honest encounter with what is eating away at the very foundations of American society, readers will be well rewarded.

Steyn has the knack of blasting away the sugar-coated cover of the fact that powerful forces are busy dismantling America. This is the same country that for more than two centuries – though not without its failures – has stood as a beacon of freedom and opportunity for millions of people. Now it's not so sure.

The author's previous book, written in 2006, bears the title *America Alone,* by which he meant to say that America was indeed an exceptional nation. It still had the opportunity to avoid what Steyn called the "civilizational exhaustion" that is afflicting the West. However, five years later, the title *After America* suggests that America, too, has capitulated to the same destructive forces and beliefs.



In the prologue, "The Stupidity of Broke," Steyn reviews the various phases of being insolvent, in addition to running out of money. He points out that it starts with the money; last year's debt had risen to $13 trillion, which is more debt than all the Congresses from 1789 till 1989 accumulated. A fundamental change of course is needed, but it will be extremely difficult to achieve.

The writing on the wall

Steyn believes that America is in danger of following on Europe's path to becoming an ever-expanding state that will drown itself in a sea of indebtedness. Now is the time for America to get serious about drastic cutbacks that will hit many people very hard. At the same time Steyn is convinced that the financial mismanagement is much more than a financial problem. He writes:

"Increasing dependency, disincentivizing self-reliance, absolving the citizenry from responsibility for their actions: the multitrillion-dollar debt catastrophe is not the problem but merely the symptom. It's not just about balancing the books, but about balancing the most basic impulses of society. These are structural and, ultimately, moral questions".

Interestingly, Steyn draws an analogy between our time and a story told in the book of Daniel. King Belshazzar of the Babylonians threw a party where they toasted the gods of gold, silver and other materials. Suddenly, in the midst of the drunken revelry there mysteriously appeared a hand that wrote these words on the wall: "*mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*," which means: counted, weighed and found wanting. The same night Belshazzar was killed and Darius the Mede became the new king.

Steyn also includes a list of words beginning with all the letters of the word Armageddon, as in: "Addiction. We spend too much, borrowing from the future to such an extent it's no longer clear we've got one."

"Redistribution. Day by day, an unprecedented transfer of wealth from the productive class to the obstructive class is delivering a self-governing republic into rule by regulators, bureaucrats, and social engineers."

Steyn sets out the two possibilities in stark terms. If America continues on its current course, he predicts that there will be nothing to unite it. It will no longer be a nation with a limited government the first generation of Americans built. "And life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness will be conspicuous by their absence."

On the other hand

Steyn points out that America is still different. In other countries, including France and Britain, rioters took to the streets demanding more from the government. America was the only nation in the developed world where millions routinely take to the streets to tell their government to stay out of their lives and their pockets. The America that "stands for economic dynamism" for "self-reliance … not the security state in which Britons are second only to North Koreans in the number of times they are photographed by government cameras," that America, Steyn wants to believe, still has a fighting chance.

The bulk of this book is devoted to describing how far America has already gone in the wrong direction. The notion of multiculturalism is a major contributor to that wrong turn. If you really believe that no culture is better than another, you will do very poorly in defending your own. As Steyn puts it: "There is a fine line between civilization and the abyss."

After America is not an easy read, though in good Steyn fashion, there are some funny stories and deft wordplays. But if you are looking for an honest, straightforward – though painful – diagnosis that is essential for the proper treatment of the disease that is afflicting America, this is the book for you.

Harry Antonides is the former director of research and education for the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC). He lives in Willowdale, Ont., and can be reached at hantonides@sympatico.ca.

Country Living

Meindert Vander Galien

Food, wine and quaint places to visit

Men and women have different interests. This is especially true when couples go away on vacation, or when they go traveling or sightseeing.

My wife and I are alike in some ways but we are also complete opposites. Mae is good at picking out neat places to eat and sleep when we travel. We did have a good laugh when she mistook The Culinary Institute of America – a huge castle-like building on a hill in the quaint town of St. Helena in the Napa Valley (north of San Francisco) of California – for a grand old hotel and a great place to stay the night. That was funny because she doesn't enjoy cooking. I do.

It was raining and getting dark as we drove into town last September looking for a place to eat and sleep. Mae likes the older hotels that have character. She loved the area with its small quirky towns whose Gothic Revival architecture – narrow, gingerbread facades and pointed arches – is reminiscent of a distant world. She spots the huge building in the distance and suggests we go there. We burst out laughing when we read the sign by the building – The Culinary Institute of America.

Since we landed in by chance, we decided to take a look inside the 117,000 sq. foot building. We learned that 2,400 students were enrolled learning culinary cooking and baking. Three (student-cooking) restaurants require reservations but the Apple Pie Bakery Café is open to anyone.

Almost 4.5 million people visit Napa Valley each year, making it a very popular tourist destination in California. The Valley is 30 miles long and only one to five miles wide. Grapes have grown in the Valley since the 1850s. In 1976, the region got a boost from the Paris Wine Tasting, in which a Napa Valley Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon beat several famous French labels in a blind tasting format. The results of this tasting cemented the region's reputation of being able to produce world-class wines. The Napa Valley is also internationally recognized as one of only nine Great Wine Capitals on earth.

While touring the area I was surprised at the light dry soil and the huge rolling hills. Very little rain falls during the summer months, but annual rainfall is 23 inches, most of it coming during the winter months. The Valley has 43,000 acres of planted vineyards and around 450 wineries that grow many grape varieties including Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Merlot and Zinfandel.

Many families bring children to Calistoga to see Old Faithful Geyser blast its 60-foot tower of steam and vapour every 40 minutes. During our visit the steam blasted every six to 10 minutes. Some folks said it was a sign of ground movement – an earthquake coming, but this didn't happen. A few miles away is the Petrified Forest, which contains the remains of the volcanic eruptions of Mount Saint Helens 3.4 million years ago. We saw gigantic redwoods covered with volcanic ash, which infiltrated the trees with silica and minerals causing petrifaction.

California has 480,000 acres of planted vineyards, mostly located in a stretch of land covering over 700 miles. The Central Valley is California's largest wine region stretching 300 miles from the Sacramento Valley south to the San Joaquin Valley. The San Joaquin Valley with flat fields of produce growing as far as the eye can see is my kind of country.

A chapter in the booklet *How Do I Begin?,* which our Bible discussion group is studying this winter, says growing grapes can be difficult. It requires the right vine stock, the right soil, and an attentive gardener. If any one of these elements is missing, the chance of producing good fruit is reduced significantly. Left to themselves, vines have a natural tendency to grow deeply into the ground, putting down roots rather than producing fruits. In order for the vines to produce fruit, the gardener has to lift them up.

Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." (John 15:1-3)

Our hope and assurance of salvation is found in Jesus, who came to glorify his Father, the gardener, and to lift up the rest of the branches.

Meindert van der Galien is a Renfrew-area (Ontario) farmer and grows a large garden.

Classifieds

Birthdays

With joy and thanksgiving to our Heavenly Father,
we invite you to celebrate with us
the **80th birthday** of our dear mother,

JOHANNA OOSTERHOF

on April 25, 2012, DV.
We pray that the Lord will continue to bless Mom as much as she is a blessing to all of us:

Leo & Susan
Henry & Evelina
Alex & Julie
Gary & Corina
Diane & John
Annette & Robert
Paul & Wilma

And much love from the growing families of your 22 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

An **Open House** in Mom's honour will be held on Sat. Apr. 28 from 2–4 p.m at Bethel CRC, 117 Windsor Drive, Brockville, ON.

Mom's mailing address is:
1171 Millwood Ave, Unit 4
Brockville ON K6V 7L5

For the Lord is good. His love endures forever, His faithfulness continues through all generations.
Psalm 100:5

With thanks to God

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Event

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April 20–21

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Anniversary

60th Wedding Anniversary Celebration
April 23, 1952 - 2012

FRED AND TRUDY FRANKRUYTER (nee Walsma)

... in all your ways acknowledge him,
and He will make your paths straight.
Prov. 3:6

Their 4 children; 13 grandchildren; and 9 great-grandchildren express their love and appreciation for their committment to showing them the way.

On the occassion of their anniversary there will be an **Open House** at 4 Hawthorne Ave in Cobourg, Ont from 2:00-4:00 pm.
All are cordially invited. Best Wishes only please.

Obituaries

Jacob Gringhuis

The Lord took home our dear son, Jacob Gringhuis after losing his battle with cancer on February 27, 2012.

Son of Auke† and Jessie Gringhuis.
Husband of Nina. Father of Debbie and Adam.
Grandfather of six grandchildren.

A memorial service was held in the Christian Reformed Church of Lindsay, Ont.

Psalm 23

Correspondence: Mrs. J. Grighuis
501-200 Glen Hill Dr S
Whitby ON L1N 8R4

Jack Bylsma

Peacefully at Woodstock Private Hospital, on March 24th, 2012 in his 100th year.

Beloved husband of Louisa Bylsma (nee Bronger).

Loved father of:
Corrie Bergman of Woodstock
Tina Stienstra of Chatham
Mike (Betty) Bylsma of Woodstock
Florence (Ben) Olthoff of London.

Cherished grandfather of 16 grandchildren, 33 great-grandchildren and 17 great-great-grandchildren.

Dear brother of Aaltje Lautenbach of the Netherlands. Also survived by several nieces and nephews.

Predeceased by his brothers Tribbe "Bill", Klaas, Tjeert, an infant grandson Jason Olthoff, and sons-in-law Jans Bergman and Henry Steinstra.

The funeral service to celebrate Jack's life was held at Covenant Christian Reformed Church, in Woodstock on March 29th.

If desired, contributions to the Back to God Hour would be appreciated.

Online condolences at
www.brockandvisser.com

August 1, 1932 March 21, 2012

Martina Sophia Van Egmond
(nee Zandbergen)

The Lord called home our dear sister, Tina, the first of six sisters.
Predeceased by our oldest brother, Wim.
Tina is survived by:
Wim† and Mien Zandbergen.
Janna and Geerlof† van Starkenburg
Gerda and Henk† vander Mey
Sophia and Chris Eyzenga
Cora and Henk Rook
Kees and Gretha Zandbergen

Grace Christian Reformed Church
in Welland Ont. will celebrate its
50th Anniversary
- praise God for his faithfulness.
Lasagne Dinner on **Saturday May 5**
and a **Worship Celebration** on
Sunday May 6, 2012 at 10:00 am.
Email: rnieuwold@becon.org for details.

Obituaries

Henry Lammers (Hendrik Reind)

August 15, 1936, Aalten, The Netherlands — March 21, 2012 Toronto, Ont.

The Lord called Henry home, in his 76th year, after a long journey with rheumatoid arthritis.

He dearly loved Leny, his wife of 46 years.
Loving father of: Will (Karen) Lammers of Beamsville, ON., and children Amanda (Jonathan, and son Klaas), Michelle (Mark, and children Merrick, Madison and Marlyse), and Rosanne (Tyler); Allan (Amy) Lammers, and children Eva, Noah and Benjamin, of Portland, OR; Audrey (Robert) Williams, and children Jack and James, of Denver, CO; Rita Lammers (Mitch), of Toledo, OH.
Dear brother of Linie (Dick) Broer, and the late Ron Lammers.

For many years, a large team of doctors and nurses at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto became part of his extended family, showing love and compassion every step of his journey. He loved the Lord, and often shared of his faith. Special thanks go to CCAC (NEO), VON nurses, Dr. T. Daniels, and Dr. R. Donevan.

A celebration of Henry's life took place at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Parry Sound, ON, on March 24th.

To send an online condolence, please visit http://www.caringbridge.org/visit/henrylammers.

If desired, the family would appreciate donations to the Canadian Bible League.

Martina Sophia Van Egmond
(nee Zandbergen)

Wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, sister, aunt, friend, child of God.

Born August 1, 1932, in Rijnsburg, the Netherlands,
died March 21, 2012 at Bethell Hospice in Inglewood, Ontario.

Who can find a wife of noble character?
She is worth far more than rubies.
Proverbs 31:10

Martina leaves behind **Cornelis Van Egmond**, her husband of 59 years, who found himself a wife of noble character.

Her children arise and call her blessed.
Proverbs 31:28

Martina also leaves behind these heirlooms of flesh and blood:

John Van Egmond and Diana Brouwer
–Nick and Virginia & little Veronica, Angie and Marty, Adrianne and Luke
Sophie and Rudy Vandenberg
–Nicole, Ben and Erin, Caleb and Chelsey
Joyce Van Egmond and Peter van der Meulen
–Joya, John, Mark David, Ellen, Peter
Cornel and Agnes Van Egmond
–Jacob, Mark Peter, Cornel, William, Matthew, Josiah, Martina Sophia

Predeceased by her youngest son, **Mark Peter**, in 1984.

Thank you to:
Martina's doctors and the staff at the Georgetown Hospital who struggled valiantly with Martina and her family against great odds;
Martina's faith community, which sustained her throughout her life by their love and prayers;
Bethell Hospice for treasuring Martina in the final leg of her journey.

Most of all,
thanks be to our faithful God
who graced Martina with every good thing.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
Psalm 23:6

Correspondence: C. Van Egmond
9601 Winston Churchill Blvd., Brampton ON L6X 0A4

Advertising

Job Opportunities

Recently run job ads can be found on our website at christiancourier.ca (Jobs link on bottom banner)

Half-time Pastor

Neerlandia CRC in classis Alberta North is currently looking for a half time ordained pastor to work alongside our current pastor and half time youth coordinator. We are a large, active, rural church with a strong youth program. Responsibilities would include mostly visiting, some part time preaching with opportunities for teaching and outreach.

A job description is available on request. Contact us at

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Please send your letter of interest or profile in confidence to
springdalepst@gmail.com

Wellingstone Christian Home

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Please contact the office @ 905-383-0754 for further information.

Please mail all resumes to Wellingstone Christian Home, 261 Stone Church Road E. Hamilton ON L9B 2X3 or email to office@wellingstone.ca

Immanuel Christian Schools

of Lethbridge, Alberta, will celebrate **50 years** of God's goodness on **June 8-9, 2012**.

We invite all former staff, students and supporters of our schools to join us that weekend. For more information, please call the business office at **(403) 327-4233** or visit our website at **immanuelchristian.org**

Pacific Christian School in beautiful Victoria, BC is searching for a

Director of Development

Pacific Christian School (PCS) has been providing faith-based Christian education in Victoria for over 50 years. Serving over 500 families and 900 students, PCS provides distinctive Christian Education for Christian families, equipping students for critical thinking, lifelong learning, and joyful service. We are looking for an enthusiastic and innovative Development Director who is passionate about Christian education.

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In this strategic and visionary position, effective interpersonal and organizational skills will be essential in developing relationships within the staff and school community, as well as externally within the broader community.

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- strong leadership, interpersonal and communication skills
- work experience in an educational environment or other non-profit organization
- skills with database management, publications and communications

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Please contact the email address below for a detailed job description.

Closing Date: April 27, 2012

Please submit your application, resume and statement of faith to the:

Search Committee
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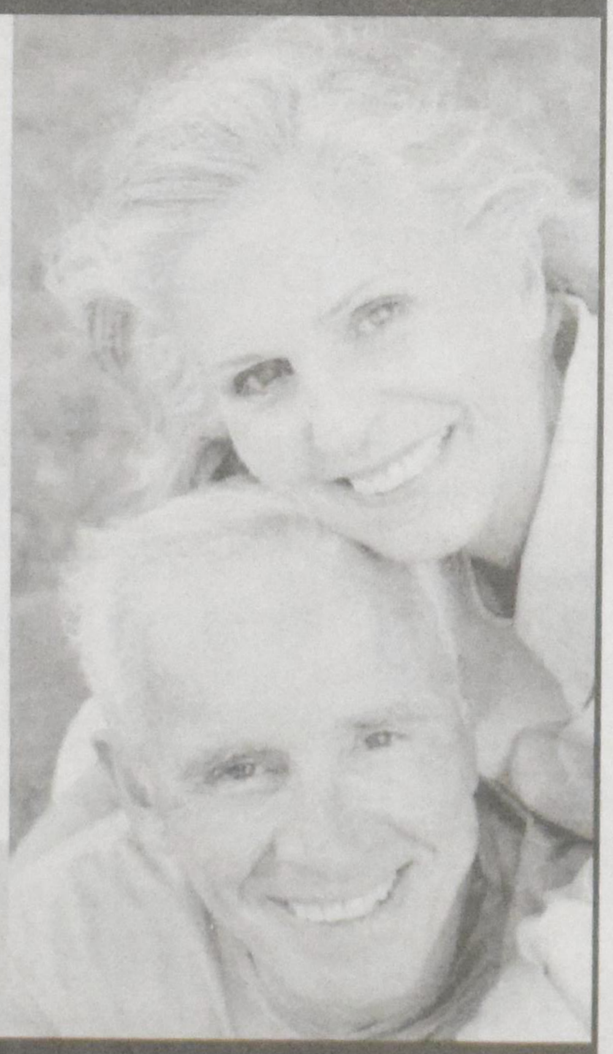

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See samples of Frank's poetry in the March 26 issue of *Christian Courier*.

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	4	2	1					
6				8				9
				6				1
8		5			3		4	
7	2						9	8
	1		6			5		3
1				7				
2				5				4
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RATES: All personal and family announcements: $6.00 per square inch.
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PHOTOS: There is a processing fee of $25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged P.I.,
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Apr 14 Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents '*Wie Kaatst...die Wint.*' Great Lakes Christian College. **Beamsville**. 2:30 pm. See Feb 27 issue.

Apr 20–21 NILDCanada Conference, "Changing Your Mind", at Knox Christian School, **Bowmanville**. A warm welcome to all educators, Homeschoolers and parents to our annual conference. Downloadable brochure at www.nildcanada.org Please join us as together we explore quality learning solutions to help students with ADHD, Dyslexia and other learning challenges.

Apr 20–22 Reformed Marriage Encounter Weekend. London, ON Register at reformedme.org.

Apr 21 Annual Male Choir Festival. 7:30 pm. Mount Hamilton CRC, **Hamilton**, Ont. Tickets $15. Call 905-689-5266 for more information.

Apr 29 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Zantingh will be preaching. DVDs are available.

May 1–4 Growing the Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit Guelph Bible Conference Grounds, **Guelph**, ON For information please visit dunamisfellowshipcanada.org For an event brochure, contact dfc@dunamisfellowshipcanada.org or 519-821-3603

May 5–6 Grace Christian Reformed Church, **Welland** ON will celebrate its 50th Anniversary. Join us for a Lasagne Dinner on Saturday and a Worship Celebration on Sunday. Contact rnieuwold@becon.org for more information.

May 4 Noon Organ Recital Series (seventh season) St. Jude's Anglican Church, **Brantford**. Every Friday in May at 12.15 p.m. Free. Featuring Stephanie Burgoyne and William Vandertuin in Organ solos and "Organ four hand" selections.

May 11 Noon Organ Recital Series (seventh season) St. Jude's Anglican Church, **Brantford**. Every Friday in May at 12.15 p.m. Free. Featuring Andrew Keegan Mackriell, Director of Music: St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral.

May 18 Noon Organ Recital Series (seventh season) St. Jude's Anglican Church, **Brantford**. Every Friday in May at 12.15 p.m.

May 25 Noon Organ Recital Series (seventh season) St. Jude's Anglican Church, **Brantford**. 12:15 p.m. Free. Featuring Joel Vanderzee, Organist Choirmaster St. John's - Kilmarnock School, Breslau.

June 8–9 Immanuel Christian Schools of **Lethbridge**, Alberta, will celebrate 50 years of God's goodness. For more information, please call the business office at (403) 327-4233 or visit our website at www.immanuelchristian.org

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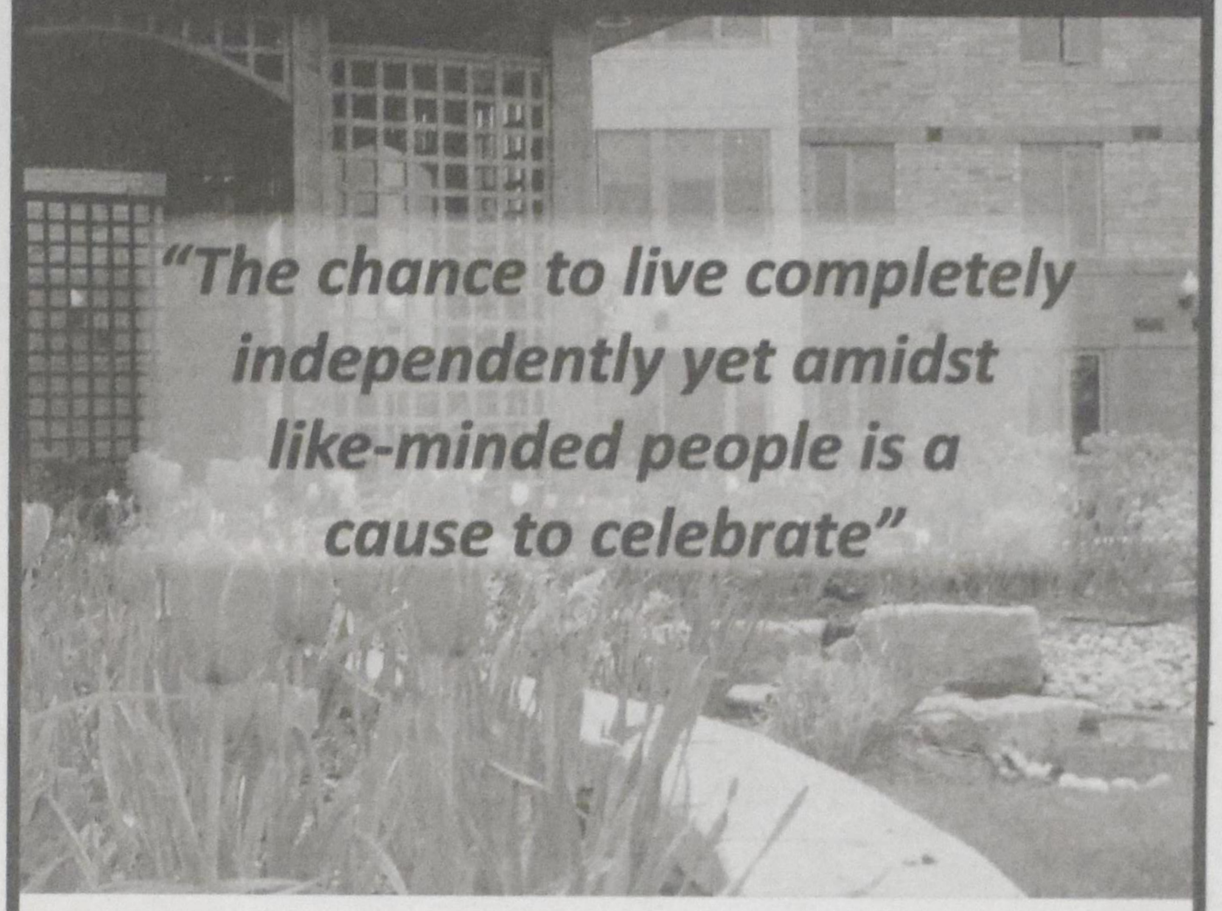

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Education in South Africa

Dora Stroobosscher

The date is Jan. 5, 2012 in South Africa. Throughout the country, thousands of learners who wrote the Grade 12 matriculation exam have gathered at garages and convenience stores. Some arrived already last night to be the first in line when the delivery trucks drop off the local paper. As the sun rises, the groups get bigger. The young people dance, sing, blow vuvuzelas or talk quietly with friends. What are they waiting for? They all want to know how they performed on the all-important exam. Students who pass are eligible to qualify for university programs and other higher education. The results will be published in today's paper for the entire world to see. The noise level increases, but nothing can mask the silent, private fear in the hearts of every one of them. What if I failed?

Waiting for matriculation exam results can be stressful for South African students.

The first newspapers arrive at some depots at 2 a.m. and are sold out before they even get to the shelves. In more remote areas, newspapers are not delivered until mid morning. At each location there is a mix of jubilation and despair. Outside a petrol station in Soweto, a group of girls huddle around a single newspaper on the ground, searching for their names. One, then another jumps up, begins screaming and dancing. "I made it! I made it!" Two girls embrace each other and walk away, battling tears. They will wait until their school opens to double check the list there. Maybe there has been a mistake? They know it's only wishful thinking, and already reality sets in for them. They are reluctant to go home. What will our parents say? How can we face them with the shame of failure? In the next few days, some teens will commit suicide to avoid the embarrassment they have caused their families.

The same day, basic education minister Angie Motshekga proudly released an average pass rate of 70.2 percent of students for the year 2011. This statistic should convince the citizens that the state of education in South Africa is really quite healthy. It certainly is an improvement over the years 2004-2009 which saw a pass rate drop from 70.2 percent to 60.7 percent.

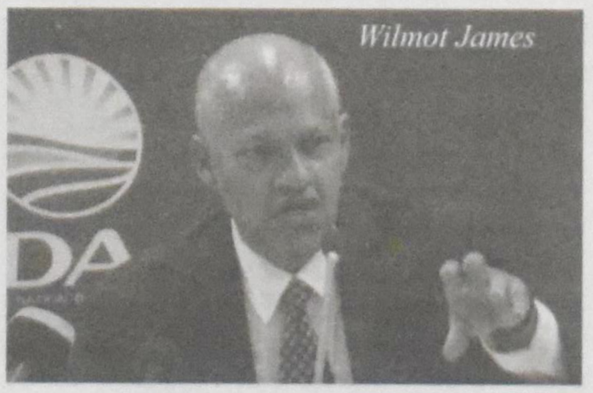
On Jan. 6, the headline in the *STAR*, a South African newspaper, shouts: THE NEW STRATEGY WORKED. Great improvement has been made by learners from township schools. A large part of the success is attributed to the Secondary School Improvement Programme which provided extra teaching time to Grades 10, 11, and 12 in selected schools that had performed poorly in the past. Out of the 331 schools that qualified, 90 achieved a pass rate of 80 percent while 241 performed above 60 percent. These figures are impressive and it would be easy to believe that this signals a real breakthrough for education in South Africa. But what do these figures *really* tell us?

In the same paper, Wilmot James, the shadow cabinet minister of education, wrote an editorial entitled *A Pass Is Never Good Enough*. He points out that the 2011 average pass rate expresses in percentage points the proportion of pupils who sat for the Senior certificate, completed the course requirements, and obtained an average of 33.3 percent for the matric exam. James agrees that it is an improvement, but it is not good enough. He writes: "A pass of 33.3 percent means that a learner has mastered only a third of the material in a field of study. This is as unambitious as it is insulting to the talent of our learners." In 2010, only 37.3 percent of those who "passed" were accepted into a university or college. James strongly suggests that the pass rate be raised to 50 percent and that more young people must be motivated to stay in school long enough to even write the final exam. Of those who started in Grade 1, only 40 percent ended up writing the 2011 Grade 12 exam. He also states that the argument that continues to be carried on by those who still blame Bantu education for the criminal impoverishment of education for black learners wears thin after 17 years into democracy. What will change the picture is to populate the schools with excellent teachers working in stable and well-managed environments supported by a ministry of education that delivers a well-planned, high quality yearly curriculum on time.

Did the two girls who were afraid to go home fail in their education or did the education system fail them?

May God bless all attempts to bring about the changes in education that are necessary so that more young people can go on and contribute meaningfully to the well-being and stability of this beautiful country!

Note: Maggie Maluleke, a Grade 12 teacher at Theocentric Christian College, set her alarm for 6 a.m. on Jan 5. She was one of the first to get a copy of the local newspaper. A jubilant e-mail to us, on the morning that we left for South Africa, said it all: THEO GOT 88 PERCENT!



Dora Stroobosscher and her husband Marc were in South Africa for the months of January, February and March on behalf of EduDeo, offering workshops and mentoring teachers in Theocentric Christian College, a black Christian high school.

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Christian Courier Short Story Contest!

I: Send in your **original short fiction (1000 to 3000 words)** on any theme by May 1, 2012. First prize receives $100 and publication in a summer issue of Christian Courier. Please note that this contest is for short stories, not essays or articles. Second prize receives a year's subscription. Submit electronically to cathy@christiancourier.ca.

II: Our readers 8 to 14 years of age can participate in the category for youth. There will be two divisions: **junior (Grades 3-5) and Intermediate (Grades 6-8)**. Send your **short stories (500 - 1000 words)** to cathy@christiancourier.ca before May 1, 2012. The first-place winner in each division will win a gift certificate to Toys'R'Us valued at $50. All stories will be considered for publication in CC..